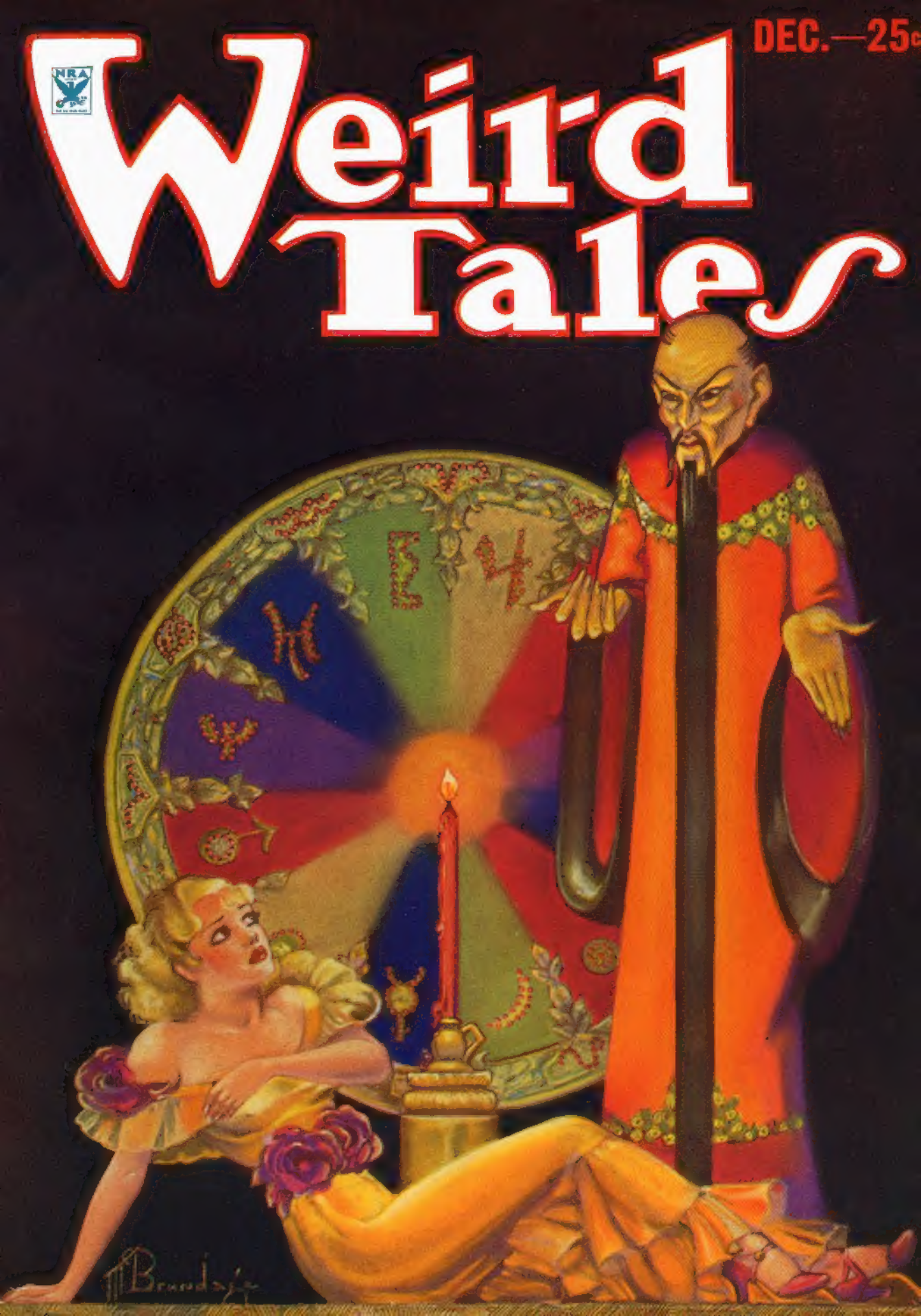
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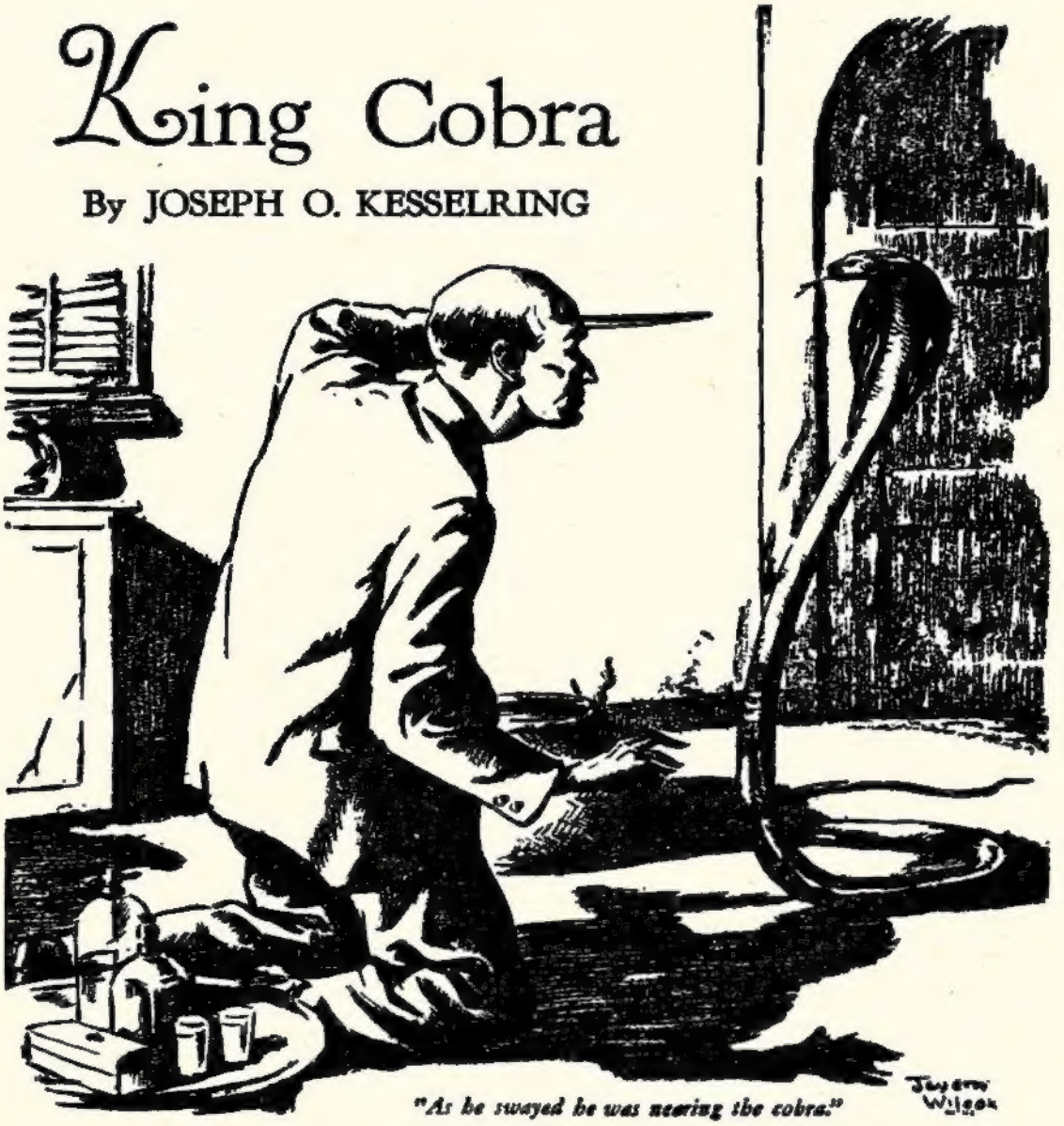
King Cobra

By JOSEPH O. KESSELRING



"As he swayed he was nearing the cobra."

A fascinating, vivid and horrifying story of the East Indies, and two men imprisoned with scores of venomous snakes

I HAVE opened my eyes in the black, unlighted hold of a holy Kiaochow funeral junk and looked up into slanting, glassy, dead eyes that gleamed and winked impossibly down at me from nowhere. I have stretched forth my hand in the stinking, inky darkness of a Johor burial pit and touched something cold, wet and soft—and it moved. I have watched in Africa while a hand, small, soft and ivory white, literally grew from the naked belly of a prostrate, bewitched Upoto black, reached up, found his throat, rested there, then disappeared, slipping back again into the ebony body—and that black was dead from strangulation! These things and others, equally unbelievable and horrible, I have seen and touched,

while cold sober and with no fever in my bones.

These things, I say, I have experienced; yet never have I suffered such unholy dread and revulsion as that which I felt that night in Java when I looked at the man who called himself Wharton.

"*I* am Wharton," he had croaked in answer to my hoarse question—and, staring, I sweat and shook as with the dengue fever.

This thing, this creature crouching there on the tiny wharf that jutted out into the reeking Salo River, it could *not* be Wharton! It could not be *human!* God! . . . My flesh crept. . . . *It was like a spider!—a monstrous, fat spider!—dressed in the clothes of a man!* The ghastly Malay moon shone down full upon him—or it.

Round at the middle he was—suddenly, ridiculously, poisonously round at the middle. Below that awful bulge the legs stretched, long, bowed and bent and of one skinny thickness from thigh to foot. Above the bulge the narrow chest rose, tapering upward to the more narrow shoulders. From the shoulders the fleshless arms hung tensely, ending, one of them, in a bony, curling hand; the other (I found it hard to believe my eyes) the other ended in *a blade!* Minus his left hand, the creature wore a broad knife-blade affixed in some manner to the stump! It glittered coldly.

Above the narrow shoulders, atop a pipe-stem neck, was a bald and shining death's-head. Loose lips fell away from long and crooked teeth; cheeks that were black hollows; a bulging, naked skull. And eyes! God, the eyes! Deep in the head they were, the whites showing like half-dollars, the centers tiny as tack-heads, and black—gleaming, boring black. As though hypnotized I continued to stare, those eyes on mine not four feet away.

I was standing in a dugout. At my feet a pop-eyed, native boat-boy sat holding the craft to the wharf. The monthly copra steamer run a week off, I had hired the boy at the mouth of the Salo, and it had taken a five-guilder bribe to conquer his then incomprehensible aversion to ferry me. His eyes on the man ashore, he was the picture of terror.

The man ashore—according to a communication from American headquarters received by me ten days before in Singapore—being Robert Wharton, was manager of the Surabaya Rubber Plantation, a holding of my company, the United outfit. This communication had informed me of a fifty-percent dropping-off of Surabaya production during the last two months. The deficiency had not been satisfactorily accounted for by the manager. Rambling letters offering fever and coolie insurrection as excuses had been received. My communication had ordered me to investigate.

Leaving Singapore immediately, I had shipped to Batavia (my first trip south of the Malay Peninsula), thence to Samarang and from there by a grain tramp to the Salo. During the entire trip south and east I had carried with me a growing feeling of foreboding. Now, before this man who called himself Wharton, it reached its climax. There came to me a conversation, the gossip of two planters vaguely overheard on board the Batavia steamer. They had annoyed me then; I had been reading. Now—what was it they had said? . . . something about—about snakes! that was it! But there was something else . . . something deep in my mind roused by sight of this hideous human before me . . . something——

I JERKED to my senses. For seconds I had continued to stare into those tiny, black eyes. Now the creature was laugh-

ing, a low, hollow sound. As he laughed he swayed from side to side from his outrageous belly up. There was a vileness in the sound and movement, an animal vileness. Shifting my gaze, I was unable to suppress an exclamation. He ceased swaying, but his laughter continued.

"Ah!" he responded, a faint trace of Latin accent in his words. "My sense of humor annoys you; yes?—or is it my eyes?" His laughter rose higher, then ceased abruptly. He pointed with the gleaming blade at the end of his arm. "But what is your business?" he snapped. "What do you want here?"

I began my response by tossing my grip to the wharf and stepping after it. My movement brought the creature's knife against my chest. I continued my response by telling him my name, Peter Garr, and my purpose of investigation.

"I have official papers of identification," I went on, "and will look over the books, works and trees beginning tomorrow morning early. And just now," I continued, "just now, unless you take that knife from my belly, I'll rip it from your arm and throw it and you into the river."

This last I said because, at my words of identification, the creature's pendulous lips had drawn farther from his teeth, his crouch had become more pronounced and the pressure of the knife had increased noticeably at my middle. Following my threat I gave him stare for stare, and the beady, tack-head eyes wavered and shifted, the knife arm lowered, the inhuman face twisted into what was undoubtedly meant to be a smile.

"A thousand pardons!" he croaked, bowing. "You will excuse an error of judgment! Ah, yes, a mere error of judgment! I welcome you!"

He chuckled again, and again I could not control a shudder.

"But you seem chilled," he leered. "Come, come! Where is my hospitality? A guest, the official ambassador of the mighty United, and I subject him to the chill of tropical Java! Tcht, tcht! Most unforgivable! But I shall make restitution! Yes, yes! You shall be very comfortable here with me and my children until my assistant, Mr. Jackson, returns from the interior, when you may begin your investigation. Come, follow me!"

With the invitation, he seized my grip, turned, and with a gait more suggestive of a crawl than a walk, moved from the wharf.

TOSSING the boat-boy an additional guilder I dismissed him and followed my strange host. Certain of his words stuck in my mind as I walked. He had spoken of his children. There was something dreadful, something sickening about the thought of that monstrosity being the father of children. I visualized them: Three, six, a dozen tiny, bulbous-bellied, spider-like counterparts of the creature ahead of me. It made the flesh crawl.

I was walking rapidly and was now but ten feet behind him. I reflected on others of his words. He had mentioned his assistant, that he was away, that I would have to wait for his return. None of that, I thought; I'm not waiting for any one. But this assistant, Jackson he had called him. I had known there was an assistant, but somehow there was something not just right.—Now, what was——? By heaven! That was it! The assistant's name was not Jackson, *it was Johnson!* His pay checks came through the Singapore office and I knew——

My thoughts snapped off. I was six feet behind Wharton. Heavy growth lay fifteen feet to the left and right. There was a sound. With a jerk I ducked, and

went to my knees. A split second, and a Malay *kris* cut the air where my head had been. Flashing and swishing it hurtled into the growth on my left. Only experience saved me. I knew the sound of a thrown *kris*. With a leap I was on my feet and ahead, my pistol in my hand. I jammed the weapon into Wharton's back.

"Use your authority!" I advised him. "Any more stunts like that and it will mean lead in your hide!"

The tack-head-eyed man turned as though in great surprize.

"Eh?" he inquired. "Is something wrong?"

"You know damned well what's wrong!" I answered. "Just a mite sooner or lower and that *kris* would have split my head like a pumpkin!"

"A *kris?*" The big-bellied one was incredulous. "Did some one throw a *kris?* Dear me! At you? Dear, dear! I must apologize! That must have been George. George is nervous. I'll speak to him."

He turned. "George!" he called, and, speaking in Malay (which, to a limited degree, I understood and spoke), commanded an unseen person to come forth.

There was a noise in the brush, a movement. I stared. Stepping from the shadows into the brilliant moonlight was the biggest, blackest negro I had ever seen. He was naked but for a loin-cloth. Like a giant dog he trotted to Wharton.

"George," the spider-like man said to him, "did you throw a *kris* at this gentleman?"

The huge black nodded and grinned as though enjoying a harmless little joke. "*Sejat, tuan*—yes, lord," he answered.

"Why did you throw the *kris*, George?" Wharton asked him.

The negro's reply was to the effect that he thought me to be an enemy creeping upon his master from behind. I did not believe him in the slightest, but Wharton admonished him, chuckling evilly the while, and dismissed him. Putting up my pistol, I let the matter pass. I decided, however, that I would not be caught again for lack of vigilance. There was an air of something decidedly wrong about the place and its people, something wrong in an unhealthy, morbid way, and I determined to find out what it was.

MY OPINION of the place and its people was strengthened greatly a few moments later. As we rounded a turn in the road, the plantation house loomed up suddenly before us, ghost-like in the silver light. (To the right of the house stood a connected series of rambling, squat shacks. I later learned they were the latex sheds and storehouses. The coolie quarters lay five hundred yards beyond on lower ground at the jungle edge.) As we approached I discerned a group of native boys standing silent and quiet in front of the house. There were a half-dozen of them. Their utter stillness was strange. Malay boys—a Malay is a boy till fifty—Malay boys are by nature unpleasantly noisy.

Wharton paused, his knife arm stiffened. "What is it?" he rasped in Malay.

Then I understood their quiet. Those natives, without actually moving, seemed to writhe, recoil and shrink before the spider-like *tuan*. Fear, abysmal, groveling fear, was behind their silence. Stammering, one of them spoke.

"Cobras, *tuan*," he quavered, and pushed forth a basket.

What happened in the next few moments added to a belief of mine which had been growing from my first sight of the plantation manager: namely, that Wharton had gone mad. Chuckling throatily, his strange eyes gleaming, he shuffled forward and dropped to his knees

by the basket. It was a shallow, round container, big at the bottom and tapering sharply to the top. He slipped the lid partially off and peered in.

"Three!" he crowed. "Three bouncing beauties! Good, good! Who caught them?" Two of the boys spoke. "Splendid, splendid!"—reaching with his skeleton hand to pat their backs—"you shall be rewarded!"

He turned his head and beckoned to me. Unwillingly I crossed to him. As I neared, the evil, hooded head of a cobra thrust itself hissing from the basket. The natives fell back. I shuddered. Wharton laughed crazily and leaned nearer the serpent.

"Come, come!" he urged me. "Do not be afraid: There is no danger. Come nearer and meet three of my children, three of my lovely, naughty children. I have others, many others; you shall meet them later. Come!"

The awfulness of his words struck me. This was what he had meant before when referring to "his children"! *His children were snakes! Deadly, poisonous cobras! Wharton was insane! Dangerously insane!*

With his knife arm he was thrusting the reptile back into the basket. Replacing the lid he cocked a tack-head eye up at me.

"So you believe me crazy, eh?" he chuckled; then he burst into a peal of wild laughter. "No," he continued in a moment, "you are wrong. Peculiar, yes, but not crazy. Not I. But here," he straightened, "perhaps I owe you an explanation. This," he thrust forth the knife arm, "this was once a hand, a lovely hand. A cobra kisseed it and I was forced to cut it off. Phtt! like that, sever it with a *kris!*" He sighed. "It was a beautiful hand. Since then I have studied the hooded beauties. I know them well. I have adopted thousands. A parent's privilege to instruct and chastise, you see." He laughed. "Yes, to chastise. I have dozens with me now, waiting to be instructed — and chastised. But understand," he leaned closer as though waxing confidential, "that beauty that kissed my hand, that was not one of these, that cobra. No, no! That was not an ordinary cobra like these! *It was a king cobra—a monstrous fellow twelve feet long!* He was the only king cobra I have ever seen. And I was forced to kill him so quickly, so quickly! But I hope! That was years ago and still I hope! There are fifty guilders to the boy who brings me one! And the time is near, the time is near! Two have been seen not far from here!"

His face, hot with excitement, had been thrust close to mine. His breath was vile. My disgust getting the better of me, I backed away and shivered. He ceased speaking abruptly and glared murderously at me; only for a moment, though, then his hideous features twisted into a smile.

"Chilly again, Mr. Garr?" he leered. "You need a rest . . . yes . . . a nice, long rest. I shall conduct you to your room."

Turning to the round-eyed natives, he instructed them to put two of the snakes to bed with their "brothers and sisters" and bring him the other one. With a "Follow me, Mr. Garr," he shuffled off to the house, and I followed with my bag.

THE room assigned me opened off the large main room and seemed comfortable and safe enough. The two windows were tightly and permanently screened, and the door carried a bolt on the inside which I shot upon entering. I felt moderately secure and was glad of it, for it was quite late and I was dog-tired.

I undressed immediately, switched off the light and climbed into bed.

Almost at once I noticed a slight crack in the bedroom door through which light shone from the next room. It disturbed me. If there were lights, Wharton must yet be up. Why didn't the crazy beggar go to bed? I listened and after a bit could hear him moving in the lighted room. Several times I began to doze but waked sharply each time, the luminous crack still before me.

For an hour I lay thus, my eyes heavy for want of real sleep, but unable to do more than doze while aware that that madman was still stirring. Finally, in disgust, I decided to smoke. I sat up. My feet touched the floor. I reached for the light cord, then stiffened.

For minutes there had been entire quiet in the next room. Now, echoing sibilantly, a new sound came to me from behind the door. *It was the hiss of a cobra!* There are few more blood-freezing sounds in the world. Following the hiss another sound pierced the door: *Wharton's low, bestial laugh!* I am not a coward, but there was something so unwholesome, so damnable in that laugh following the hiss that the cold sweat stood out on my body. What in the name of God could the fiend be doing? Again came the hiss, and again louder, and again; and Wharton's inhuman laughter seemingly timed to the hisses. Unable to stay longer in ignorance I leaped to my feet, softly crossed to the door and peered through the crack.

At the sight that met my horrified eyes the hair stood out at the back of my neck as though pulled. There in the center of the big, brightly lighted room, down on his knees, knife arm outstretched, rocking sideways from his awful belly up, and that hollow laugh coming from his deathly head, was the human spider, Wharton. Six feet in front of him, rearing up from the floor a good three feet, its flat, evil head swaying from side to side with the man ahead, black, forked tongue darting out, beady eyes fixed, and hissing venomously, was a loathsome cobra. Sick with disgust, I nevertheless stared as if frozen to the door.

A moment, and I gasped. *Wharton was inching up! As he swayed he was nearing the reptile!* The man was even madder than I had thought! Inch by inch, closer, closer. Five feet. Four feet. Surely he'd stop now! At three feet the reptile would strike! No! Closer. Three feet. Still the snake did not strike. Two and a half feet. Two feet. *Wharton's face swayed two feet in front of the most poisonous of all snakes!* This was suicide! A cobra bite on the face is the end! I thought of my pistol.

The thought fled; amazement routed it. Before me in that room I was witnessing a miracle. Wharton's face was no nearer the snake, just two feet, but not because Wharton had stopped his forward creeping. *The cobra was backing up!* Back, back he inched, swaying, swaying, hissing, the hideous spider-man following. Back, back. I was watching a sight seldom before witnessed by a human being. The cobra was hypnotized! *Wharton was instructing one of his children!*

Back, back. Wharton's eyes came into my view. They seemed to be spinning, whirling like tiny, black tops. Back. The sweat poured from my armpits. Back. They were nearing the wall. Wharton's outthrust knife was but two inches from the serpent's throat. Back. Surely at the wall the snake would strike! Back. Six inches, three inches, an inch. The snake was at the wall and had not struck! The knife drew nearer. I saw it touch the throat.

The rest happened quickly. With a fiendish crow of delight, Wharton plunged the knife into the reptile's throat, pinning the writhing, twisting, hissing horror to the wall. Positively nauseated I turned from the door. Wharton had "chastised" one of his children.

WEARILY climbing back into bed, I heartily hoped that I had witnessed the last act of the night's gruesome entertainment; and for a matter of minutes—perhaps thirty—it seemed that I had. All noises had ceased in the other room and the luminous crack had blinked out of being. I had fallen into a sound, but wary sleep.

Suddenly, though, I was torn into complete wakefulness. Stabbing through the silent night had come the sharp falsetto shriek of a human being. Again it cut the stillness. It was not a strangled death-cry, it was the cry of insane fear. I swore impatiently. "A coolie woman, probably," I decided, "waking in the night to find her man knifed beside her." Turning on my side I determined to ignore it, whatever it was.

But I was not permitted to. The cries continued and seemed to be nearing the house. They had taken on a sobbing note. As they neared, the added noise of approaching voices joined them, low, excited voices jabbering in Malay. I rose from bed, and slipping into trousers and slippers, crossed to the door. Footsteps sounded on the porch. There was a timid knock on the outer door. I heard Wharton shuffle growlingly across the big room beyond my own, heard him open the porch door.

"What is the meaning of this, you pigs?" he rasped.

A terrified, sobbing voice answered him. I caught enough of the words to know that a boy had been bitten by a snake. Pulling back the bolt, I opened the door and stepped into the room. The room was dark, but I could see the group at the door. The boy's pleading voice came to me more plainly.

"Save Moko, *tuan!*" he was begging in his native tongue. "Please save Moko! Allah's light upon you, *tuan*, please save Moko!"

"To hell with you!" Wharton barked brutally. "Getting me out of bed at such an hour! Save yourself! Cut off your hand as I did, you pig! Away with you, you swine, all of you!"

But the terrified native continued to plead. "No, *tuan!* Please, *tuan!* Moko will turn black and die! Please, *tuan!* Only *tuan besar* can save Moko! It was a cobra king, *tuan!* Moko will turn black and——"

Wharton leaped back at the boy's words, pressed the light switch. He was transfigured. His face was pulled into lines of devilish joy. He dragged the boy inside.

"It was what?" he croaked. "A king? Where, where? Quick!"

The boy's right hand was wrapped tightly around his left wrist. "By the pail-house, *tuan*, at the Four Grove! Please, *tuan*, there is great pain——"

But Wharton was not listening. He had sprung to the corner of the room, picked up a ten-foot bamboo pole on the end of which was a heavy noosed cord, shouting at the same time: "My pants and boots, one of you swine! Quick!"

They were brought to him. In seconds he had them on. He started for the door. The boy was howling. I stepped forward.

"Just a minute!" I snapped. "You're surely not going to leave that boy to die!"

Wharton wheeled. He hadn't seen me before. He laughed crazily. "To hell

with the boy!" he shouted and shuffled rapidly out of the door.

I worked swiftly. There should have been serum in the house, but if there was, I didn't know where, nor had I time to hunt for it. The venom had been in the boy's hand almost five minutes, and cobra venom often kills in fifteen minutes. Fortunately, though, the boy's other hand clutching his wrist, had allowed little of the poison to go into his arm.

Instructing two of the natives to put water on to boil, I fashioned a makeshift tourniquet of my handkerchief and a stick. Bidding the boy retain his grip on his wrist, I applied it tightly just above. The fangs of the snake had entered on the side of the palm. Looking at the two punctures I decided that the boy had told the truth as to the snake having been a king cobra. The holes were three inches apart; only a twelve-foot serpent with a giant head could have made them.

With the sharpest blade of my jackknife I slit the boy's hand twice at the point of the fang punctures. Two long and deep incisions I made, and the blood spouted forth in a small fountain. He howled, of course, but I knew that his one chance for life lay in the drawing of every drop of blood from that hand. When this had been accomplished I removed the tourniquet and bade him plunge his hand into water that was uncomfortably hot and hold it there. His groans were clamorous, but he obeyed me without hesitation.

I finished the treatment with a generous application of iodine procured from a bottle carried in my bag, bound the hand with the cleanest cloths I could find, and instructed him to go to bed and stay there quietly for ten hours. Calling down upon my head the most choice blessings of Allah, he left, and the rest of the natives left with him.

MY FIRST-AID work had taken upward of a half-hour, and the jabbering group was not yet out of hearing when Wharton returned. The man was beside himself, mumbling and chuckling in feverish excitement. In his right hand he had the bamboo pole and on his left hip the round, small-topped basket. The basket seemed heavy.

Entering the room, he set the basket down, and ignoring me, pulled forth a four-foot-square box from the corner. The box had a hinged lid on the top that fastened with a strong catch. One entire side of it was composed of heavy, finely woven wire netting. He dragged the box to the center of the room beside the basket, unfastened the catch, pulled the lid a quarter up and held it thus with his foot. Reaching down, he picked up the basket, hoisted it to the box opening, and tilted it. With his knife hand he pried the basket lid loose and off. Something soft and heavy plopped to the box floor. The lid slammed down, the catch snapped. Wharton sprang back and went to his knees before the wire netting, laughing insanely.

"Mr. Garr," he crowed, "you have brought me luck! Such luck! Come, Mr. Garr, come and look! Come and see my latest, finest, biggest child! The child of my dreams!"

I knew what I would see, but I stepped forward anyway. It was a cobra, of course, but such a cobra! Truly it was a king. Coiled as it was in the box, its huge, elevated head touching the lid, I could not tell its exact size, but from the thickness of its body, which was big around as the calf of a man's leg, I knew it to be not under twelve feet. It and the man squatting before it made a sickening sight. A brief glance satisfied me completely.

"Quite a child," I said, turning away.

"But I hope you're not going to leave it in the house overnight."

Wharton seemed amazed. "Not leave it in the house?" he croaked, glaring up at me. "Put this beauty outside and take a chance of losing it after all these years? By my life, I believe you are insane!"

"Perhaps so," I countered, chuckling in spite of myself, "but it's your child, you know, not mine; hence my regard for it is not exactly a fatherly one. And look here, if you have instruction and chastisement in mind for your offspring here, put it off till the morning—won't you—and let me get a bit of sleep?"

The spider-man's little, black eyes bored coldly into mine as his lips laughed. "Sleep!" he echoed. "So you wish to sleep, Mr. Garr. U'm—well, the wishes of a guest are law. You shall not be disturbed again—tonight." And as I moved toward my door: "Not tonight, Mr. Garr," he murmured.

And his words, suggestive as they sounded, were literally true, for I entered my room, shed trousers and slippers, climbed into bed and slept without interruption for seven hours.

IT WAS almost ten when I awoke next morning. Leaving my room I was greeted by a house-boy who waited by a table on which was served a breakfast. The meal was for me, it seemed, by order of *tuan besar*—the great lord. The boxed cobra now occupied a corner of the room.

"Where is *tuan* Wharton?" I asked as I sat down.

The boy's eyes darted furtively to right and left as he murmured: *"Tida tahu, tuan*—I know nothing, lord."

His attitude was again the attitude of those natives of the night before. It irritated me. I said: "Look here, what are you afraid of, you and the other boys? You all act as though you were about two hops and a gulp ahead of hanging. What's wrong around here, anyway?"

The boy backed off, quaking. He personified utter dread as he murmured over and over: *"Tida tahu, tuan! Tida tahu, tuan!"*

Plainly there was some awful fear hanging over his head and the head of every one else I had met on the place. Obviously, however, there was no information to be gained from him; so I finished my meal in silence. Afterward I lighted my pipe, wandered out to the veranda, down, and around the house. As I neared the back, a metallic sound came to me, the sound of honing. A moment and I beheld George, the giant negro, sitting in the shade of the house carefully honing a *kris* with a smooth stone.

I greeted him in Malay. He made no verbal answer, but, looking up, gave me a grin that brought the corners of his mouth to his ears. It struck me that he was the only human on the plantation, outside of Wharton, who was not infected by the virus of fear. He was even bigger than I had remembered. He was at least six feet five and he must have weighed two hundred and fifty pounds. There was something humorous in the cheerful grin he threw at me, considering that he was engaged in sharpening what was probably the very weapon he had thrown at my head the night before. I smiled.

"Going to shave some one?" I asked. "Or perhaps cut their hair?"

His grin couldn't deepen, but it lengthened. He nodded vigorously.

"Fine," I continued, "but be careful that the blade doesn't slip. Any more slips"—I tapped my holstered pistol—"and I won't be so forgiving."

He threw back his head and roared with laughter.

At that moment I saw Wharton. He

was crossing from the outbuildings to the house. I hailed him and approached.

"Good morning!" I said briefly. "If you don't mind, I'll start with the books this morning. You haven't yet seen my credentials, and if you——"

"My *dear* Mr. Garr," he interrupted testily, "I *told* you that you would have to forego your investigation till the return of my assistant. I am really too busy to——"

"Rats!" I snapped. "You are the manager! Why should I have to wait for your assistant?"

His lips drew back in a smile that belied the gleam in his eyes. "Rats, cats or even snakes," he retorted. "You will nevertheless wait with your snooping till the return of Mr. Jackson."

He turned on his heel. I laid a restraining hand on his bony arm.

"Just a minute!" I said. "How does it happen, Wharton, that you refer to your assistant as Jackson when his name is Johnson?"

Snarling, he faced me with a jerk. His knife arm raised and drew back. Reaching quickly I seized it, twisted it and dug it gently into his belly. There was murder in his tiny, tack-head eyes as they bored into mine. The count of five, though, and he relaxed. His corpse-like face warped into its grin.

"Eh?" he said: "Oh!—Johnson—yes, of course, Johnson. A mere slip of the tongue, Mr. Garr. Johnson, Jackson, Jackson, Johnson—what's in a name, Mr. Garr?"

Drawing away from me, he glided off chuckling. Sensing the futility of further argument, I let him go.

FORCED to content myself with what I could find out unaided, I spent the rest of the day strolling around the plantation. The seemingly faultless activity about the place surprized me. Natives and coolies, though sullen, uncommunicative and all marked by that puzzling brand of fear, all appeared to be doing a full day's work. I could see no single reason for a dropping off of production.

Toward night, returning to the house through the rapidly falling dusk from an inspection of trees that seemed in an excellent state of production, I was softly greeted by a passing native. Looking more closely I saw that he was the boy who had been snake-bitten. I paused to inquire how he felt. As I had expected, he had been quite ill all day, but now was considerably better. Examining his hand by the aid of a small flashlight I habitually carried, I assured him that he was in no further danger. Though characterized by the furtiveness I was learning to expect, his thanks were profuse and he seemed sincerely grateful to me. It occurred to me that I might gain some information from him.

"Moko," I inquired in his native dialect, "are you afraid of something?"

Moko's physical and verbal responses contradicted each other. "No, *tuan!*" he answered in a terrified voice.

"Now, come, Moko," I urged gently. "You're not afraid of me, are you? You know that I'm your friend. I know there's something frightening you; tell me what it is. Is it *tuan* Wharton?"

At my words the boy's face changed. Fear was still there, but something else as well—hatred. Eyes blazing, he leaned closer to me.

"No, *tuan!*" he whispered hoarsely. "No! Moko loves *tuan* Wharton! But the big-bellied one, *tuan,* the father of cobras, he is not *tuan* Wharton! He is Spider Horrosek! Spider Horrosek, *tuan!*"

Spider Horrosek! The name sank into my subconscious mind like a fish-hook, dragging up a memory. Spider Hor-

rosek! The gossipping planters on board the Batavia steamer! By the gods! That was the name they had spoken! Spider Horrosek, a one-handed madman with unbelievable power over snakes! But Wharton, where was he? And Johnson? Could the fiend have——

I turned to the boy, but he was gone. It was almost dark now. The heavy, brooding tropical night seemed to settle around me like a tangible, choking something. Poor Wharton—and Johnson—they were dead without a doubt. That fiend would not——

But wait! Those letters from the plantation, they had been in Wharton's handwriting! Of course, they might have been forged, but—— Well, there was one way to find out; there was one man who knew whether Wharton was dead or alive, and if alive, where he was—Horrosek! I determined to get the truth from him or cut his foul throat with his filthy knife in the effort.

I FOUND him in the big living-room on his knees before the cage of the king cobra. He had worked the giant reptile into a rage and was laughing in idiotic glee as it hurled itself futilely against the wire netting.

"Greetings, Mr. Garr!" he called. "Come see my big, naughty child! How the loving beauty would delight to kiss me! He is—ah!—you seem perturbed about something, Mr. Garr. I hope——"

"Get up!" I rapped. "Quick, if you don't want to be dragged up!"

He arose. I drew close to him.

"Get this, Mr. Spider Horrosek, I'm on to the game from top to bottom, and I'm giving you just thirty seconds to answer one question, thirty seconds, and if you don't come clean I give you my word I'll rip your skinny throat from ear to ear with that nasty toad-sticker on the end of your arm! Start talking! Where is Wharton?"

The creature's pasty face darkened. The blazing fury of thwarted madness was in the bared teeth, the black, spinning eyes. He must have thrown the full power of his will into that crazed, hypnotic stare, for, meeting it, I was conscious of a strange and subtle tugging at the roots of my faculties. Whatever his powers, though, they were insufficient, and to demonstrate the fact I seized his knife arm, bent it and brought the knife to his throat.

"Where is Wharton?" I repeated.

With an obvious effort he pulled himself together. His eyes dropped. He laughed his low, inhuman laugh.

"So I am, one might say, caught up with, Mr. Garr," he murmured. "Well! I suspect I delayed your demise a mite too long. A pity! But," with a sigh, "the game is to him who plays and wins; eh, Mr. Garr? If you will release me I will conduct you to Mr. Wharton, who yet was alive and in fair health this morning."

"Walk!" I said, drawing my pistol and thrusting it into his back. "And no tricks!"

Out of the house we marched, to the main latex shed. Inside the door, Horrosek, without instruction, pushed a light switch. The dark room was flooded with blinding light. Across the room we moved—my pistol still in his back—to another door. Again without bidding, he switched on lights. Through that door and to another door. Opening it, he turned to me. He said:

"The light button of this room is on the far wall, Mr. Garr. Do you dare to go into the darkness with me?"

My eyes accustomed to the powerful light, the darkness of the room was profound. My reply, however, was to seize

his knife arm above his wrist and push my pistol more firmly into his spine.

"Hop ahead!" I said.

I was totally blind in the blackness of the room. We moved ahead. Three steps, five steps, ten steps. The room must be fifteen steps across, I figured. Twelve steps, fifteen steps. We should be there. I was about to speak. Then it happened.

As though struck by a bullet, the pistol flew from my hand. With the force of a leaping tiger something hit my body from above and behind, something massive and alive. At the same instant two arms like elephant trunks wrapped round me. Forward I was hurled. I tensed myself and threw out my arms, expecting to crash into a wall. No. On I went, to a cement floor, along it, tearing the hide from legs, arms and face. As I brought up at last, a heavy door slammed, a bolt shot home. Stunned and bleeding I heard the throaty, croaking laugh of Spider Horrosek.

"The game is to him who plays and wins, Mr. Garr!" he crowed. "I will leave you to the entertainment of my children!"

I sat up. Rubbing and shaking my head I strove to clear my senses. Undoubtedly it had been the giant negro, George, who had attacked me, hurling me through a doorway, into another room. Probably hanging to a ceiling beam, his eyes accustomed to the darkness, he had watched till I was below him and had leaped on me. But where was I?

Then, sending a cold chill from heels to hair, Horrosek's words came to me: "I will leave you to the entertainment of my children!" His "children"! Snakes! Cobras! I leaped to my feet. God! Had he thrown me into a den of snakes? The darkness was absolute. I thought of my tiny flashlight. It was a long, round affair carried as a fountain pen. I drew it forth, praying that it be unbroken; my prayer was answered. Its white beam cut into the blackness, moved over four planked walls, a heavy door, a planked ceiling and a cement floor. No snakes were visible. I heaved a sigh of relief and switched off the light.

My relief, though, was short-lived. A noise came to me, a sliding noise close at hand. I heard Horrosek's laugh; it came from beyond the right wall. I pressed the light.

Before my eyes the top plank of the far wall was sliding out of sight to the right. It disappeared into the right wall as I stared. The next one started to slide—over—over—and disappeared. The blackness of another compartment showed. There had been eight planks; another one slid away. A new sound, familiar in its dreadfulness, came to me—hissing.

One by one the planks slid out before me as I pressed in helpless horror against the far left corner. Two planks were left, twelve inches each in width. Gazing over them, I gasped. Ten, fifteen, a score or more of flat, elevated cobra heads stared out at me. Another board went. The last one slid away. Weaponless, helpless, I was locked in a room with a regiment of deadly snakes!

HORROSEK'S laugh died away. I saw a cobra glide forward—another—another—a dozen—nearer. I held my breath. Ten feet in front of me they stopped, loathsome heads held high, staring, staring with their beady, unblinking eyes. It struck me that the light was attracting them. Should I put it out? I shuddered at the thought. Anything was better than the uncertainty of darkness.

Experimenting, I moved the light. The flat, cruel heads followed it. Good! They saw only the light and not me behind it. Perhaps I——

I stopped. A tapping had sounded on the plank wall which my left hand was pressing. I tapped back. The flat heads turned slightly at the sound. A voice, sounding weak, came to me through the wall: "Hello, over there!"

It was taking a chance to call back, but I did. A nervous swaying and hissing of the watchful reptiles followed. Then the voice questioned: "Who are you?"

"Peter Garr, of Singapore!" I responded. "And you?"

"Wharton!" came the answer.

Wharton! Wharton was really alive; a prisoner next door to me! Again his voice sounded.

"Has he put the snakes on you?"

"Yes!" I answered.

I heard a faint "Damn!" and: "Listen! The top plank of the wall here. Can you reach it?"

I tried. "Yes!" I called.

"Good! Feel at the top. There's a bit of an opening: If you can get your fingers in you may be able to pull it loose. I can't help; I'm all in."

I stretched. I am over six feet tall with a long reach, and I could just make it. I felt the opening, a crack of little more than a half-inch where the board didn't quite meet the ceiling. My hopes fell. How could I get my big fingers into that narrow slot?

My movements had aroused the snakes. Hissing, they had inched a foot nearer. Desperation seized me. I *must* get my fingers in that crack, even though I ripped the flesh to the bone. But wait; first I had better——

Bending, I lowered the light to the floor. The beady eyes followed it. Giving it a sharp push I rolled it away from me, clear to the other corner of the room. The snakes followed, gliding after it. It had been taking an awful chance. Had it swerved and the beam turned on me——

Again I reached for the ceiling, felt along the crack. I found a spot two feet from the front wall where my middle finger went in to the first joint. With all the power I could muster I pushed in. The wood bit into the flesh. Harder. My fingers sank to the second knuckle. But it was a two-inch plank. Sweating, the pain sickening my stomach, I worked my hand and pushed desperately. In—in. With a sudden give my knuckles slipped through.

I bent them and tugged. It was like pulling on solid steel. The plank was held at the end by a heavy, built-out, wooden slot. I glanced round at the cobras. My unavoidable noise was drawing them. Tongues darting, they were leaving the light and nearing me. Madly I tugged, but my stretched position gave me no leverage. I knew, abruptly, that I could never pull that plank loose with one hand. I reached up with the other. Clamping my jaw, I pushed the fingers into the crack. It was agony. The opening was narrower here. In—in—in. I almost fainted as the flesh gave and my fingers slipped through.

I climbed the wall, braced my feet against it and threw every ounce of strength into one tug. There was a splintering rip. The heavy slot at the plank end gave. The plank came out six inches. From the corner of my eye I saw several cobras leave the field of light and enter the darkness beneath me. Pulling my left hand free I shoved it under the board and through into the other room, straining frantically at the plank with my right hand. A splintering roar and it came loose, slid in over my head, and fell to the floor with a crash. With a speed born of cold terror, imagination plunging dozens of venom-dripping cobra fangs

into me, I scrambled up, through the opening, and dropped to the floor on the other side more exhausted than I had ever before been in my life.

IT WAS minutes before I spoke. When I did I told Wharton immediately who I was officially and the purpose of my visit to the plantation. He responded with a recital of what had occurred to him.

Spider Horrosek, it seemed, and the big negro, George, had drifted into the plantation one night about two months before. That was in the rainy season, and they had been hungry and without shelter, and Wharton had housed and fed them for days. The utter isolation of the plantation must have given Horrosek his idea.

The spider-man had begun by killing Johnson, the assistant. "Poor devil!" Wharton said. "Locked him in that same room you were in with a half-dozen cobras he'd caught. Must have had a fearful death." Next, Horrosek, with the aid of the negro, had lured Wharton to the cell we now occupied, locked him in and, instilling the fear of death into natives and coolies by killing a few of them in horrible ways, had taken possession of the place.

"He has me damn' near starved to death," Wharton continued, "but he keeps me alive to write letters that will cover things at headquarters. He's absolutely mad, of course, but he had a damned clever and definite scheme. By diverting just half the production for two months or so he could keep clear of investigation; then when things would begin to look shady he could finish me, take the proceeds of full production for about a month and make a clean getaway. Clever, eh?"

I agreed. "And it rather looks," I added gloomily, "as if his clever scheme is going to work beautifully—as far as we're concerned."

Wharton sighed. "Yes, we're here to stay until he comes for us, I can tell you that. I've gone over the place thousands of times since I've been here and there's no way out—except into the cobra den. The floors are cement and the walls and ceiling are two-inch planks. I tried for a long time to break through the wall ahead of you because the good old outdoors is on the other side of it, but——"

His weak voice trailed off on a discouraged note. I could not see him, of course, but he sounded pretty far gone. And it was small wonder, considering that he had been in that awful hole for two months.

For what seemed like hours we sat on the floor of that black room in morose silence. My hands gave me excruciating pain and my mind dwelt on the dark certainty that Horrosek would kill us both when he discovered me here. It was horrible to die cooped up like rats in a trap. Surely there must be some scheme, some trick that would——

Abruptly, and for little reason, a face flashed into my memory: Shifty Morgan, a professional American bum and once a good friend of mine. Words he had spoken to me shot through my mind:

"They kin never hold me in them little places, Pete, ol' boy, 'cause there never was a one-story, county jail didn't have the same weakness. They makes the floor of thick cement an' the walls of thicker cement an' then the fools never hardly more than sets the roof on. Jist git your shoulder under it an' push an' it'll lift every time."

I slapped my thigh and leaped to my feet. "Wharton," I said, "did you make this building?"

"Ugh? Sure; that is, I superintended the building of it."

"How is the roof fastened on?"

"Roof? Why—well, how are roofs usually fastened on?"

"I thought so! Listen! Is there a box in this cell, or something I could stand on, something strong?"

"Sure, there's a box in the corner over there. The Spider gave it to me to set my grub on. It's pretty strong, I guess. What are you going to do with it?"

I didn't answer. Groping my way to the corner, I found the box, carried it to the far wall, stood on it, put my shoulder to the ceiling and pushed. I could have shouted aloud. Good old Shifty Morgan had been right! The roof had given slightly!

Setting my feet more firmly, I heaved again with more power. The complaining squawk of yielding nails brought Wharton to his feet. Three of the roof planks were two inches up from the wall. I could see stars through the opening. Once more I heaved. The roof was lined with tin sheeting and it tore loose with a metallic screech. I would have to hurry. That din would raise the dead.

Again I lifted. With a crash, three roof boards tore free of the wall. I shoved them clear, pulled myself up, tossed my right leg over and turned to reach for Wharton. I froze.

From below me to my right had come a low, heavy chuckle. I twisted. There, ten feet out from the building, looming black and enormous in the moonlight, stood the negro, George. He had a belt over his loin-cloth. In it was a glittering *kris* and a pistol, my own pistol. As I looked he loosened the belt, removed it and threw it, with the *kris* and pistol, twenty feet to his rear. Crouching like a great ape, he shuffled slowly forward, laughing gleefully as he moved.

"Come down, *tuan*," he chuckled in thick Malay. "Come down so that George with his two hands may tear the flesh from your bones in strips!"

It was the end, I thought. I could fight a *man*, I was big; but this was not a man, it was a gorilla! I was a slender flyweight beside him, despite my one hundred and eighty pounds. Well, it would be better than the unclean agony of a death from cobra venom, and maybe——

Suddenly flinging my left leg clear, I sprang.

I LANDED a foot in front of him and slightly to the right. With the momentum of my leap and all my own strength behind it I gave him my right full in the middle. I have watched hard, two-hundred-pound men fall as though shot from a less powerful blow. The black merely paused and continued chuckling. His belly was like concrete. Arms out, hands open, he came forward. I backed a pace, my left shot out, met his jaw. He shook his head as if brushing off a fly. On he came, crouching, weaving. He was wide open. Backing, I shot punches at him, hard punches. My torn hands spattered blood on him. He only laughed and moved forward, massive arms clutching and tensed. I was two feet from the wall. I must keep those hands off me at all costs!

I put a terrific right to his stomach. The blow was deliberately low. I was fighting for my life. It brought a grunt from him, a chuckling grunt. Suddenly he sprang. I leaped to the left. One of his hands struck my shoulder, closed on it. Desperately I twisted and jerked, tore loose leaving half my coat in his grip. I sprang behind him, whipped a smashing left into his kidneys. He wheeled. I could not wipe out that chuckle!

Again he came for me, more swiftly now and closer to the ground. He was harder to hit. Twice my left hand landed on his cast-iron skull. Numbing pain shot up my arm. Back—back—the chuckling African animal after me. I had hit him dozens of times with blows of murderous power and he was only amused! Back. My arms were beginning to tire. My left hand felt dead. Circling, I tried to back to the *kris* and pistol. He sensed my purpose, charged and drove me to the side and around. Back. Again I was nearing the wall. Breathing was becoming difficult. Sweat poured from my brow into my eyes. I raised my hand to wipe it away.

At that moment he leaped again, head on this time, crooked arms stretched wide. I ducked, sprang back and off, struck the wall. A clutching hand found my chest, hooked in my clothes. I wrenched and twisted. The clothes held. With a sickening sweep I was pulled over and in. A great, black arm wrapped round me, crushing me against his stinking, greasy chest. A hand like a vise seized my shoulder, tightened on it. Madly I struggled, striking wildly at the giant body. The arms around me pressed tighter, ever tighter; the hand on my shoulder sank deeper. The unending chuckle went on and on. He would rip me limb from limb and laugh while doing it!

Hot steel rods stabbed into my shoulder. My ribs were burning spikes being driven through my back. A roaring began in my ears. Red haze blinded me. I felt myself being lifted from the ground. My legs flew back. I kicked out crazily, felt my big boots strike flesh and bone. Vaguely I heard a howl. The pressure on chest and shoulder released abruptly. I fell back against the wall. A moment and my head cleared slightly. I looked ahead.

Four feet in front of me I dimly saw the negro. His grin and chuckle were gone. Lips drawn ferociously from his teeth he was scowling at me as, bent double, he rubbed his legs. *I had kicked his shins.* He was *not* completely invulnerable, then!

The thought braced me. Perhaps the brute had other more vital weaknesses. Positive of death, I had been fighting with hopeless desperation, without thought; now I drew great breaths of air into my lungs, worked my numbed shoulder and arm. Ideas flashed through my rapidly clearing brain. Where could I possibly hurt the giant? His chin and body were iron; I would only break my hands on them. Kicking his shins would but delay my end. I could reach his throat easily enough, but his neck was too——

His neck! The back of his neck! I could hear Sawtell's voice (Sawtell, Princeton wrestling coach and jiu-jitsu exponent extraordinary): "But only in a pinch, Garr, because, if it is properly delivered, the neck *must* break!" The rabbit! The jiu-jitsu rabbit blow!

Head down, snarling like an enraged baboon, the big black charged. His laugh gone now, he meant to finish me quickly. But my fifteen-second breather had cleared my head. I waited a split second, dropped to a squat, shot up sideways twisting at the waist, my right hand raised and open. He hit the wall where I had stood. The back of his lowered neck was beneath me. Now! With a swishing, ax-like stroke I brought the side of my open hand down on his neck where it joined his head. There was a snapping sound. I leaped back. The blow had nearly broken my wrist. A moment and, to my horror, the negro

straightened! Good God! If *that* hadn't hurt him I was—— I stared.

With a ghastly, surprized grin on his face the black man had turned to me. He was swaying. His massive head was lolling sideways on his shoulder. He seemed to be trying to straighten it. The truth swept over me: *his neck was broken!*

I saw his eyes glaze in the moonlight. A last gurgling chuckle came from his loose lips. His legs buckled. Like a great side of beef he pitched forward to the ground—dead. I mutely thanked God.

I was badly in need of a rest. I felt nauseated and weak; my body was one great ache. With Horrosek still to be accounted for, though, there was no time for sick leave. My first move was to gain possession of the *kris* and pistol. The gun in its holster, I dragged myself to the shed roof and spoke to Wharton. The poor fellow had lain in his prison helpless during my scuffle. It was a job to pull him up and out, for he was almost entirely without strength and I felt as weak as the proverbial kitten. I managed it finally, however, handed him the *kris*, and we started for the house. I assumed that Horrosek had entire confidence in his giant black guard and would not be expecting us. I was right.

NEARING the house, I saw the spider-man standing idly in front of the veranda. At the same moment he saw Wharton and me, stared, turned, scuttled up the veranda steps and into the house. I heard the door bolt rattle home.

A moment before that, though, something else happened. We were approaching the house from the side. As Horrosek entered the front door opening on the large living-room, I saw a dark, briefly-clad figure slip from the rear living-room window. The window closed a moment before the front door bolt sounded. The figure remained at the window, seemingly peering into the room.

Wharton and I made for the front door. We were perhaps twenty seconds in getting there. I pounded on the door.

"The jig's up, Horrosek!" I called. "Better come peaceable or you'll come dead!"

There was no response. I was about to speak again when Horrosek's low, croaking laugh came to me. It was horribly reminiscent of that "instructing and chastising" performance I had witnessed. I called once more. That laugh was the only response. It was growing louder. I hammered on the door. The laugh continued—louder. What could the crazy devil be up to now? Wharton suggested that we go to the rear window, cover him with the pistol there and force him out.

At the rear window we found a native boy, the boy I had seen crawling out. It was Moko, the lad who had been snake-bitten. Ordering him away, I drew my pistol and stepped up to the window. I stiffened in horror.

Facing me, Horrosek was down on his knees ten feet from the far wall. Laughing his insane laugh, he was swaying from side to side. Four feet in front of him, directly between me and him, its flat, hooded head elevated five feet and swaying regularly with him, was the giant king cobra. I knew instantly that the boy, Moko, had released the snake from its cage.

For minutes I watched. I was expecting the snake to start backing toward me and I was waiting for a chance to shoot it without hitting Horrosek. The spider-man's laugh continued to grow in volume. Suddenly, then, cold sweat broke out on me. *The cobra was not backing! Horrosek was backing!—slowly, slowly, inch by*

inch, to the wall! The cobra, swaying, hissing, was inching forward!

The spider-man had been ten feet from the wall. Now he was only five!—and laughing, louder, louder. His laugh was becoming a scream. Four feet from the wall! I was helpless. I could not shoot the snake without shooting Horrosek. Closer. Three feet. Two feet. I could see those tiny, black eyes—spinning—but now with the terror of a damned soul in them. Closer. One foot. Closer. *Horrosek was against the wall!* He shrieked.

I shall never forget the rest. Sometimes at night I awake sweating with that hellish shriek in my ears—and with the awful vision before me of that monstrous king cobra striking, striking, striking at Spider Horrosek's deathly head. Three times it sank its poisonous fangs into his face—and a cobra bite on the face is the end. One can not use a tourniquet on a man's neck, you know.

There was but one humane thing to be done and, though I couldn't do it myself, I did the next best thing. I loaned my pistol to Moko, the native boy, who had not obeyed my orders about leaving.

"The *tuan* first, Moko," I suggested.

That my suggestion was superfluous was demonstrated by the eagerness with which the grinning little devil seized my pistol.

A Dead House

By CLARENCE EDWIN FLYNN

Ah yes, a house can die. Have you not seen
Places where Love and Laughter long have been,
Where gleaming lights have made the windows gay,
Go dark, and dead, and silent in a day?
The blinds were drawn. Soft footfalls through the gloom
Traversed each cold and unresponsive room.
Yet all those silent spaces, o'er and o'er,
Echoed with happiness not long before.

Some one whose spirit had bestowed its grace
In strange, transforming power upon the place
Had gone. Hands that the daily life had blessed
Were folded to the everlasting rest.
Lips that had laughed and sung in happiness
Were closed in unresponding quietness.
An empty shell remained, its spirit fled.
Its heart had ceased to beat. The house was dead.

Red Gauntlets of Czerni

By SEABURY QUINN

"And from the bubble looked a face."

A smashing, breath-taking story of the little French occultist and ghost-breaker, Jules de Grandin

1. *Revenant*

OUR visitor leant forward in his chair and fixed his oddly light-colored eyes on Jules de Grandin with an almost pleading expression. "It is about my daughter that I come," he said in a flat, accentless voice, only his sharp-cut, perfect enunciation disclosing that English had not been his mother tongue. "She is gravely ill, *Monsieur*."

"But I do not practise medicine," the little Frenchman answered. "There are thousands of good American practitioners to whom you could apply, *Monsieur*——"

"Szekler," supplied the other with an inclination of his head. "Andor Szekler, sir."

"Very well, Monsieur Szekler; as I say, I am not a practitioner of medicine, and——"

"But no, it is not a medical practitioner whom I seek," the other interrupted eagerly. "My daughter, her illness is more of the spirit than the body, and I have heard of your abilities to fight back those who dwell upon the threshold of the door between our world and theirs, to conquer such ills as now afflict my child. Say that you will take the case, I beg, *Monsieur.*"

"*Eh bien,* you put a different aspect upon things," de Grandin answered. "What are the symptoms of *Mademoiselle* your daughter, if you please?"

Our visitor sucked the breath between his large and firm white teeth with a sort of hissing sigh, and a look of relief, something almost like a gleam of secret triumph, flashed in his narrow eyes. He was a man in late middle life, not fat, but heavily built, blond, regular of features save that his cheek-bones were set so high that they seemed to crowd his light, indefinitely colored eyes, making them seem narrow, and pushing them into a slight slant. Dry-skinned, clean-shaven save for a heavy cavalry mustache waxed into twin uprearing horns, he had that peculiarly well-groomed aspect that denotes the professional soldier, even out of uniform, and though his forehead was broad and benevolent, his queerly narrowed slanting eyes modified its kindliness, and the large, firm mouth, with its almost wolfishly white teeth, lent his face a slightly sinister expression. Now, however, it was the father, not the soldier trained in Old World traditions of blood and iron, who spoke.

"We are Hungarian," he began, then paused a moment, as though at a loss how to proceed.

"One surmised as much," de Grandin murmured politely. "One also assumed you are a soldier, *Monsieur.* Now, as to *Mademoiselle* your daughter, you were about to say——?" He raised his brows and bent a questioning look upon the visitor.

"You are correct, *Monsieur,*" responded Szekler. "I am—I was—a soldier; a colonel of hussars in the army of the old monarchy. You know what happened when the war was done, how Magyarország and Austria separated when the poltroon Charles gave up his birthright, and how our poor land, bereft of Transylvania, Croatia and Slavonia, was racked by civil war and revolution. Things went badly for our caste. Reduced to virtual beggary, we were harried through the streets like beasts, for to have worn the Emperor's uniform was sufficient cause to send a man before the execution squad. With what little of our fortune that remained I took my wife and little daughter and fled for sanctuary to America.

"The new land has been good to us; in the years which I have spent here I have recouped the fortune which I lost, and added to it. We were very happy here until——"

He paused and once more drew in his breath with that peculiar, eager sound, then passed his tongue-tip across his lower lip. The sight affected me unpleasantly. His tongue was red and pointed like an animal's, and in his oddly oblique eyes there shone a look of scarcely veiled desire.

De Grandin watched him narrowly, his little, round blue eyes intent upon the stranger's face, recording every movement, every feature with photographic fidelity. His air of unsuspecting innocence, it seemed to me, was a piece of superb acting as he prompted gently: "Yes, *Monsieur,* and what occurred to spoil the happiness you found here?"

"Zita, my daughter, was always delicate," Colonel Szekler answered. "For

a long time we feared she might be marked by that disease the Turks call *gusel vereni,* which is akin to the consumption of the Western world, except that the patient loses nothing of her looks and often seems to grow more beautiful as the end approaches. It is painless, progressive and incurable, so——"

"One understands, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin nodded; "I have seen it in the Turkish hospitals. *Et puis?*"

"Our Magyar girls attain the bloom of womanhood early," answered Colonel Szekler. "When Zita was fourteen she was mature as any American girl four years her senior, and for a time her delicacy seemed to pass away. We sent her off to school, and each season she came home more strengthened, more robust, more like the Zita we would have her be. A month ago, however, her old malady returned. She shows profound lassitude, often complaining of being too tired to rise. Doctors we have had, five, eight of them; all said there is no trace of physical illness, yet there she is, growing weaker day by day. Two days ago I think I found the cause!"

Again that whistling, eager sigh as he drew in his breath before proceeding: "Zita was lying on the chaise-longue in her room, and I went upstairs to ask if she felt well enough to come to luncheon. She was asleep. She was wearing purple-silk pajamas, and a shawl of purple silk was draped across her knees, which enabled me to see it more distinctly.

"As I opened the door to her chamber I saw a patch of white, cloud-like substance, becoming denser and bigger as I watched, issuing from her left side just below the breast. I say it was like cloud, but that is not quite accurate; it had more substance than a cloud, it was more like some ponderable gas, or a great bubble of some gelatinous substance being gradually inflated, and as it grew, it seemed to thicken and become more opaque, or opalescent. Then, taking form as though modeled out of wax by the clever hands of an unseen sculptor, a face took shape and looked at me out of the bubble. It was a living face, Monsieur de Grandin, normal in size, with skin as white as the scraped bone of a fleshless skull, and thick, red lips and rolling, glaring eyes that made my blood run cold.

"I stood there horror-frozen for a moment, repeating to myself: 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph have pity on us!' and then, just as it had come, that cursed, milky cloud began to disappear. Slowly at first, but with ever-increasing speed, as though it were being sucked back into Zita's body, the great, cloudy bubble shrank, the dreadful, leering face flattened out and elongated, melting imperceptibly into its frame of hazy, gleaming cloudiness; finally the whole mass vanished through the fabric of the purple garment which my daughter wore.

"She still continued sleeping peacefully, apparently, and I shook her gently by the shoulder. She wakened and smiled at me and told me she had had a lovely dream. She——"

"TELL me, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin interrupted, "you say you saw a face inside this so strange bubble emanating from Mademoiselle Zita's side. Did you by any chance recognize it? Was it just a face, or was it, possibly, the countenance of someone whom you know?"

Colonel Szekler started violently, and a look of frightened surprize swept across his face. "Why should I have recognized it?" he demanded in a dry, harsh voice.

"*Tiens,* why should crockery show cracks, or knives dismember chickens, or table legs be built without knees?" de Grandin countered irritably. "I asked you if you recognized the face, not why."

Colonel Szekler seemed to age visibly, to put on ten more years, as he bent his head as though in tortured thought. "Yes, I recognized him," he answered slowly. "It was the face of Red-gauntlet Czerni."

"Ah, and one infers that your relations with this Monsieur Czerni were not always of the pleasantest?"

"I killed him."

De Grandin pursed his lips and raised inquiring brows. "Doubtless he was immeasurably improved by killing," he returned, "but why, specifically, did you bestow the happy dispatch on him, *Monsieur?*"

Colonel Szekler flicked his tongue across his nether lip again, and again I caught myself comparing him to something lupine.

"The vermin!" he gritted. "While I and my son—eternal rest grant him, O Lord!—were fighting at the front for Emperor and country, that toad-creature was skulking in the backwaters of Pest, evading military service. At last they caught him; shipped him off with other conscripts to the Eastern front. Two days later he deserted and went over to the Russians. An avowed Communist, he and Bela Kun and other traitors were hired by the Russians to foment Bolshevist cells among Hungarian prisoners of war."

The colonel's breath was coming fast, and his odd, light eyes were glazed as though a film had dropped over them, as he fairly hurled a question at us:

"Do you know—have you heard how two hundred loyal Hungarian officer-prisoners—prisoners of war, mind you, entitled to protection and respect by the law of nations—were butchered by the Russians and their traitorous Hungarian accomplices, because they could not be corrupted?"

De Grandin nodded shortly. "I was with the French Intelligence, *Monsieur,*" he answered.

"My son Stephan was one of those whom Tibor Czerni helped to massacre—the swine boasted of it later!

"Back he came when war was done, led home to Hungary by the instinct that leads the vulture to the helpless, dying beast; and when the puppet-republic fell and bolshevism rose up in its place this vermin, this slacker and deserter, this traitor and murderer, was given the post of Commissar of the Tribunal of Summary Jurisdiction in Buda-Pest. You know what that meant, *hein?* That anyone whom he accused was doomed, that he was lord of life and death, a court from whose decisions there was no appeal throughout the city.

"You heard me call him 'Red-gauntlet'. You know why? Because, when it did not suit his whim to order unfortunate members of the bourgeoisie or gentry to be shot or hanged, he 'put the red gauntlets on them'—had his company of butchers take them out and beat their hands to bloody pulp with mauls upon a chopping-block. Then, crippled hopelessly, suffering torment almost unendurable, they were given liberty to serve as warning to others of their kind whose only crime was that they loved their country and were loyal to their king.

"One day the wretch conceived another scheme. He had been pampered, fawned upon and flattered since his rise to power till he thought himself omnipotent. Even women of our class — more shame to them!—had not withheld their favors to purchase safety for their men or the right to retain what little property they had. My wife—the Countess Szekler she was then—was noted for her beauty, and this slug, this toad, this monstrous parody of humankind determined to have *her*. This Galician cur presumed to raise his eyes

to Irina Szekler — *kreuzsakrament,* he who was not fit to lap the water which had laved her feet!

"Out to our villa in the hills beyond Buda he went, forced himself into our house and made his vile proposals, telling my wife that he had captured me and only her complaisance could buy me immunity from the Red Gauntlets. But Szeklers do not buy immunity at such a price, and well she knew it. She ordered the vile creature from her presence as though she still were Countess Szekler and he but Tibor Czerni, son of a Galician money-lender and police court journalist of Pest.

"He left her, vowing dreadful vengeance. Only the fact that he had not brought his bullies with him saved her from immediate arrest, for an hour later a squadron of 'Lenin Boys' drove up to the house, looted it of everything which they could carry, then burned it to the ground.

"But we escaped. I came home almost as the scoundrel left, and we fled to friends in Buda who concealed us till I had time to grow a beard and so alter my appearance that I dared to venture on the street without certainty of summary arrest.

"Then I began my hunt. Systematically, day by day, I dogged the villain's steps, seeking for the chance to wash away the insult he had offered in his blood. Finally we met face to face in a side street just off Franz Joseph Square. He was armed, as always, but without his bodyguard of cutthroats. Despite my beard and shabby clothes he recognized me instantly and bawled out frantically for help, dragging at his pistol as he did so.

"But to draw the rapier from my sword-stick and run him through the throat was but an instant's work. He strangled in his blood before he could repeat his hail for help; so I dispatched the monster and escaped, for no one witnessed our encounter. Next day I fled with my wife and little daughter, and through a miracle we were able to cross the border to freedom."

"And had you ever seen this revenant —this materialization—before the painful incident in *Mademoiselle's* boudoir?" de Grandin asked.

Colonel Szekler flushed. "Yes," he answered. "Once. Though Stephan died a hero, and our loss was years ago, the wound has never healed in his mother's heart. Indeed, her sorrow seems increasing as the years go by. She has been leaning more and more toward spiritism of late years, and though we knew the Church forbids such things, my daughter and I could not bring ourselves to dissuade her, since she seemed to get some solace from the mediums' mummery. A month ago, when the first symptoms of Zita's returning illness were beginning to make their appearance, she prevailed on us to attend a séance with her.

"The sitting was held at the house of a medium who calls herself Madame Claire. The psychic sat at the end of a long table on which a gramophone's tin trumpet had been placed, and her wrists were fastened to the back of her chair with tape which was sewed, not tied. Her ankles were similarly secured to the front legs of the chair, and a blindfold was tied about her eyes. Then the lights were turned off and we sat with our hands upon the table, staring out into the darkness.

"We had waited some time without any manifestation, and I felt myself growing sleepy with the monotony of it, when a sharp rap sounded suddenly from the tin cone lying on the table. *Rat-tat-tat,* it came with a quick, clicking beat, then ended with a heavier blow, which caused a distinct metallic clang. No sooner had

this ceased than the table began to move, as though pushed by the medium's feet; yet we had seen her ankles lashed securely to her chair and the knots sewed with thick linen thread.

"Next instant we heard the tin horn scraping slowly across the table-top, as though being lifted with an effort, only to fall back again. This kept up several minutes; then a voice came to us, rather weakly, but still strong enough to be understood:

A, B, C, D, E, F, G,
All good people hark to me,
Where you sit there, one two, three——

"The senseless doggerel was spouted at us through the trumpet which had risen and floated through the air to the far corner of the room. I was about to rise in anger at the childishness of it all when something happened which arrested my attention. The room in which we sat was closed up tightly. We had seen the medium shut and lock the door, and all the windows were latched and heavy curtains hung before them. The place was intolerably hot, and the air had begun to grow stale and flat; but as I made a move to rise, there was a sudden chilling of the atmosphere, as though a draft of winter wind had blown into the room. No, that is not quite accurate. There was no wind nor any stirring of the air; rather, it was as though we had all been put into some vast refrigerator where the temperature was absolute zero. What gave me the impression of an air-current was an odd, whistling sound which accompanied the sudden change of temperature—something like the whirring which one hears when wind blows through telegraph wires in wintertime.

"And as the chilling cold replaced the sultry heat, the piping, mincing voice reciting its inane drivel through the trumpet was replaced by another, a stronger voice, which laughed a cackling, spiteful laugh, then choked and retched and strangled, as though the throat from which it came were suddenly filled up with blood. The words it spoke were almost unintelligible, but not quite. I'd heard them fifteen years before, but they came back to me clearly, as though it had been yesterday:

" 'Pig-dog, I'll have her yet. Next time, I'll come in such a way that you can not prevail against me!'

"They broke off with an awful, gurgling rattle, and I recognized them. It was the threat that Tibor Czerni spewed at me that day in Buda-Pest when I ran my rapier through his throat and he lay choking in his blood upon the sidewalk of Maria Valeria Street!

"Just then the trumpet fell crashing to the floor, and where it had been floating in the air there showed a spot of something luminous, like a monster bubble rising from some foul, miasmic swamp, and inside it, outlined by a sort of phosphorescence, showed the grinning, malignant face of Tibor Czerni.

"The medium woke up shrieking from her trance. 'Lights! For God's sake, turn on the lights!' she screamed. Then, as the lamps were lighted: 'I'm a trumpet psychic; my controls never materialize, yet——' she struggled with the bonds that held her to the chair in a perfect ecstasy of terror, crying, groaning, begging to be released, and it was not till we had cut the tapes that she could talk coherently. Then she ordered: 'Get out; get out, all of you—someone here is followed by an evil spirit; one of you must have done it a great wrong when it was in the flesh—*one of you is a murderer!* Out of my house, the lot of you, and take your Nemesis with you!' "

De Grandin tweaked the needle-points of his tightly waxed, diminutive mustache. "And the luminous globe, the one with Monsieur the Dead Man's face

in it, did it disappear when the lights went up?" he asked.

"Yes," responded Colonel Szekler, "but——"

"But what, if you please, *Monsieur?*"

"There was a distinct odor in the room, an odor which had not been present before Czerni's cursed face appeared—it was the faint but unmistakable odor of decomposing flesh. Trust a soldier who has seen a hundred battlefield cemeteries plowed up by shell-fire weeks after the dead have been buried to recognize that smell!"

For a long moment there was silence. Colonel Szekler looked at Jules de Grandin expectantly. Jules de Grandin turned a speculative eye on Colonel Szekler. At length: "Very well, *Monsieur,*" he agreed with a nod. "The case intrigues me. Let us go and see *Mademoiselle* your daughter."

2. *Zita*

COLONEL SZEKLER'S house faced the Albemarle Road, a mile or so outside of town. It was a big house, bowered in Norway spruce and English holly and flowering rhododendron, well back from the highway, with a stretch of smoothly mown lawn before and a well-tended rose garden on each side. There was no hallway, and we stepped directly into a big room which seemed to combine the functions of library, music room and living-room. And as a mirror gives back the image of the face which looks in it, so this single room reflected the character of the family we had come to serve. Books, piano, easy-chairs and sofas loomed in the dim light filtering through the close-drawn silken curtains. An easel with a partly finished water color on it stood by a north window; beside it was a table of age-mellowed cherry laden with porcelain dishes, tubes of color and scattered badger-hair brushes.

Beside the concert-grand piano was a music-stand on which a violin rested, and the polished barrel of a 'cello showed beyond the music-bench. A bunch of snowballs nodded from a crystal vase upon a table, a spray of mimosa let its saffron grains fall in a graceful shower across a violet lampshade. Satsuma ash-trays stood on little tables beside long cigarette boxes of cedar cased in silver. Everywhere were books; books in French, German, Italian and English, some few in Danish, Swedish and Norwegian.

De Grandin took the room in with a quick, appraising glance. "*Pardieu,* they live with happy richness, these ones," he advised me in a whisper. "If *Mademoiselle* makes good one-tenth the promise of this room, *cordieu,* it will have been a privilege to have served her!"

"*Mademoiselle*" did. When she came in answer to her father's call she proved to be a slender, straight young thing of middle height, blond like her sire, betraying her Tartar ancestry, as he did, in her high cheek-bones and slightly slanting eyes. Her face, despite the hallmark of non-Aryan stock, was sweet and delicate as the blossom of an almond tree—"but a wilting blossom," I told myself as I noted white, transparent skin through which showed veins in fine blue lines. There was no flush upon her cheek, no light of fever in her eyes, but had she been my patient I should have ordered her to bed at once, and then to Saranac or Colorado.

"Mother's gone downtown," she told her father in a soft and gentle voice. "I know that she'll be sorry when she hears these gentlemen have called while she was out."

"Perhaps it's just as well she's out," the colonel answered. "Doctor de Grandin is a very famous occultist, as well as a physician, and I've called him into

consultation because I am convinced that something more than bodily fatigue is responsible for your condition, dear. Will you be kind enough to tell him everything he wants to know?"

"Of course," she answered with a faint and rather wistful smile. "What is it that you'd like to hear about, Doctor? My illness? I'm not really ill, you know, just terribly, terribly tired. Rest and sleep don't seem to do me any good, for I rise as exhausted as when I go to bed, and the tonics they have given me"—she pulled a little face, half comic, half pathetic—"all they do is make my stomach ache."

"*Ah bah,* those tonics, those noisome medicines!" the little Frenchman nodded in agreement. "I know them. They pucker up the mouth, they make the tongue feel rough and sore—*mon Dieu,* what must they do to the poor stomach!"

Abruptly he sobered, and: "Let us have the physical examination first," he ordered.

At the end of half an hour I was more than puzzled, I was utterly bewildered. Her temperature and pulse were normal, her skin was neither dry nor moist, but exactly as a healthy person's skin should be; fremitus was in nowise more than usual; upon percussion there was no indication of impaired resonance, and the stethoscope could find no trace of mucous rales. Whatever else the young girl suffered from, I was prepared to stake my reputation it was not tuberculosis.

"Now, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin asked as he completed jotting down our findings in his notebook, "do you recall the night that you and your parents attended Madame Claire's séance?"

"Of course; perfectly."

"Tell us, if you please, when first you saw the face within the globe of light. How did it look to you? Describe it, if you will."

"I didn't see it, sir."

"*Morbleu,* you did not see it? How was that?"

A faint flush crept across the girl's pale cheeks, then she laughed a soft, low, gurgling laugh, half embarrassment, half amusement. "I was asleep," she confessed. "Somehow, I'd been very tired that day—not as tired as I am now, but far more tired than my usual wont, and the air in Madame Claire's drawing-room seemed close and stuffy. Almost as soon as the lights were shut off I began to feel drowsy, and I closed my eyes—just for a minute, as I thought. The next thing I knew the lights were up and Madame Claire was trying to shriek and talk and cry, all at the same time. I couldn't make out what it was about, and it was several days before I heard about the face; the only way I know about it now is from piecing scraps of conversation together, for I didn't like to ask. It would have hurt poor Mother dreadfully if she knew I'd gone to sleep at one of her precious sittings with the spirits."

"Ah? So she has attended these séances often?"

"Gracious, yes! She pretended to Father that the one we went to was her first, but she'd been going to Madame Claire for over a year before she plucked up courage to ask Dad to go with her."

"And had you ever gone with her before?"

"No, sir."

"U'm. Now tell me: have you been subject to unusual dreams since that night at Madame Claire's?"

The blush which mantled her pale face and throat and mounted to her brow was startling in its vividness. Her long, pansy-blue eyes were suddenly suffused with tears, and she cast her glance de-

murely down until it rested on the silver cross-straps of her boudoir sandals. "Y-yes," she answered hesitantly. "I—I've had dreams."

"And they are——?" he paused with lifted brows, and I could see the sudden flicker in his little, round blue eyes which presaged keen excitement or sudden, murderous rage.

"I'd rather not describe them, sir," her answer was a muted whisper, but the deep flush stained her face and throat and brow again.

"No matter, *Mademoiselle*, you need not do so," he told her with a quick and reassuring smile. "Some things are better left unsaid, even in the medical consulting-room or the confessional."

"INVITE us out to dinner, if you please," he told the colonel as we parted on the porch. "Already I have formed a theory of the case, and if I am not right, *parbleu*, I am much more mistaken than I think."

"DON'T you think you should have pushed the examination further?" I demanded as we drove back to town. "If Zita Szekler's trouble is psychic, or spiritual, if you prefer, an analysis of her dreams should prove helpful. You know Freud says——"

"Ah bah," he interrupted with a laugh, "who in Satan's naughty name cares what that old one says? Was it necessary that she should tell her secret dreams to me? *Cordieu*, I should say otherwise! That melting eye, that lowered glance, that quick, face-burning blush, do they mean nothing in your life, my friend, or is it that you grow so old and chilly-blooded that the sweet and subtle memories——"

"Confound you, be quiet!" I cut in. "If externals are any indication, I'd say the girl's in love; madly, infatuatedly in love, and—by George"—I broke off with a sudden inspiration—"that may be it! 'Love sickness' isn't just a jesting term; I've seen adolescents actually made ill by the thwarting of suppressed desire, and Zita Szekler's an Hungarian. They're different from the colder-blooded Nordics; like the Turks and Greeks and even the Italians and Spaniards, they actually suffer from an excess of pent-up emotion, and——"

"Oh là, là—hear him spout!" the little Frenchman cut in with a chuckle. "You are positively droll, my olden one. And yet," he sobered suddenly, "you have arrived at half—no, a quarter—of the truth in your so awkward, blundering fashion. She *is* in love; sick—drunk—exhausted with it, *mon ami;* but not the kind of love you think of.

"Consider all the facts, if you will be so kind: What do we discover? This very devil of a fellow, Tibor Czerni, has made overtures to Madame Szekler while her husband is away. For that the colonel kills him, very properly. But what does Czerni say while he is dying on the sidewalk? He promises to come back, to have the object of his black and evil heart's desire, and to come in such a way that all resistance to his coming shall be unavailing. *N'est-ce-pas?*

"Very well, then. What next? The years have come and gone. Madame Szekler has grown older. Doubtless she is charming still, but Time has little pity on a woman. She has grown older. Ah, but her little, infant daughter, *she* has ripened with the passing of the seasons. She has grown to sweet and blooming womanhood. Have we not seen her? But certainly. And"—he put his gathered fingers to his lips and wafted an ecstatic kiss up toward the evening sky—"she is the very blossom of the peach, the flower of the jasmine; she is the

morning dew upon the rose—*mordieu*, she is not trying on the eyes!

"Now, what turned Madame Szekler's thoughts to spiritism? One does not surely know, but one may guess. Was it only the preying thought of her loneliness at the loss of her first child, or was it not, perhaps, the evil influence of that wicked one who was constantly hovering over the house of Szekler like the shadow of a pestilence; ever dwelling on the threshold of their lives with intent to do them evil?"

"You mean to intimate——" I started, but:

"Be quiet," he commanded sharply. "I am thinking.

"At any rate his opportunity arrived at last. Poor Madame Szekler sought out the medium and let her guard be lowered. There was the opening through which this evil, discarnate entity could inject himself, the doorway, all unguarded, through which he might proceed to spoil the very treasure-house of Szekler. Yes.

"You realize, my friend, that a spiritualistic séance is as unsafe to the spirit as a smallpox case is to the body?"

"How's that?"

"Because there are low-grade discarnate entities, just as there are low-grade mortals, spirits which have never inhabited human form—but which would like to — and the lowest and most vicious spirits whose human lives have been but cycles of wickedness and debauchery. These invariably infest the sittings of the spiritists, ever seeking for an opening through which they may once more regain the world and work their wicked wills. You know the mediums work through 'controls'? *Ha*, I tell you the line of demarcation between innocent 'control' by some benevolently-minded spirit and possession by an evil entity is a very, very narrow one. Sometimes there is no line at all.

"Now, how can an evil spirit enter in a human body—gain possession of it? Chiefly by dominating that body's human will. It is this will-dominance, which is akin to hypnotism, that is the starting, the danger-point from which all evil things work forward. You have been to séances; you know their technique. The dual state of mental concentration and muscular relaxation which is necessary on the part of everyone for the evocation of the medium's control is closely analogous to that state of passive consent which the hypnotist demands of his subject. If a person attending a séance chances to be in delicate health, so much the worse for him—or her. The evil spirit, striving for control of mortal flesh, can force his way into that body more easily than if it were a vigorous one, precisely as the germ of a physical disease can find a favorable place to incubate where the phagocytic army of defense is weak.

"Now, consider Mademoiselle Zita's condition on the evening of that so abominable séance. She was 'tired', she said, so tired that when she 'closed her eyes just for a moment' she fell into instant slumber. Was her sleep a natural one, or was it but a state of trance induced by the wicked spirit of the wicked Czerni? Who can say?

"At any rate, we know that Czerni's spirit materialized, though Madame Claire declared no spirits ever did so in her séances before. Moreover, while the innocuous control of Madame Claire was making a fool of itself by reciting that so silly verse, it was roughly shouldered from the way, and Czerni's dying threat was bellowed through the trumpet, after which the trumpet tumbled to the floor and Czerni showed his wicked face.

"He has come back, even as he promised, my friend. The materialization which the colonel witnessed in his home the other day establishes the fact. And

he has come back to fulfill his threat; only, instead of possessing the mother, as he swore to do when he was dying, he has transferred his vile attentions to the young and lovely daughter. Yes, of course."

"Oh, you're fantastic!" I derided.

"Possibly," he nodded gloomily. "But I am also right, my friend. I would that I were not."

3. *The Phantom Lover*

MADAME SZEKLER, who presided at dinner, proved as representative of the old, vanished order of Hungarian society as her husband. Well beyond the borderline of middle age, she still retained appealing charm and beauty, with a slender, exquisitely formed figure which lent distinction to her Viennese dinner gown, a face devoid of lines or wrinkles as a girl's, high-browed but heavy-lidded eyes of pansy blue and a pale but flawless skin. Her hair, close-cropped as a man's and brushed straight back with a flat marcelle, was gleaming-white as a cloud adrift upon a summer sky, and gave added charm, rather than any impression of age, to her cameo-clear features.

"Zita was too tired to come to dinner; I left her sleeping soundly shortly after you had gone," Colonel Szekler apologized, and de Grandin bowed assent.

"It is well for her to get as much rest as she can," he answered; then, in an aside to me:

"It is better so, Friend Trowbridge; I would observe *Madame* at dinner, and I can do so better in her daughter's absence. Do you regard her, too, if you will be so kind. Ladies of her age are apt to become neurotic. I should value your opinion."

Dinner was quite gay, for de Grandin's spirits rose perceptibly when the main course proved to be boned squab, basted in wine, stuffed with Carolina wild rice and served with orange ice. When the glasses were filled with vintage Tokay he seemed to have forgotten the existence of such a thing as trouble, and his witty sallies brought repeated chuckles from the colonel and even coaxed a smile to Madame Szekler's sad, aristocratic lips.

The meal concluded, we adjourned to the big living-room, where coffee and liqueurs were served while de Grandin and I smoked cigars and our host and hostess puffed at long, slim cigarettes which were one-third paper mouthpiece.

"But it grows late," the little Frenchman told us as he concluded one of his inimitable anecdotes; "let us go upstairs and see how Mademoiselle Zita does."

The girl was sleeping peacefully when we looked into her room, and I was about to go downstairs again when de Grandin plucked me by the sleeve.

"Wait here, my friend," he bade. "It yet wants a half-hour until midnight, and it is then that he is most likely to appear."

"You think she's apt to have another —visitation?" Madame Szekler asked. "Oh, if I thought that wretched séance were the cause of this, I'd kill myself. I only wanted to be near my boy, but——"

"Do not distress yourself, *Madame*," de Grandin interrupted. "He was bound to find a way to enter in, that one. The séance did at most but hasten his advent —and that of Jules de Grandin. Leave us with her, if you please. If nothing happens, all is well; if she is visited, we shall be here to take such steps as may be necessary."

FOR hours our vigil by the sleeping girl was uneventful. Her breath came soft and regular: she did not even change position as she slept; and I stood by the

window, smothering back a yawn and wishing that I had not drunk so much Tokay at dinner. Abruptly:

"Trowbridge, my friend, observe!" de Grandin's low, sharp whisper summoned my attention.

Turning, I saw that the girl had cast aside the covers and lay upon her bed, her slender, supple body showing pale as carven alabaster through the meshes of her black-lace sleeping-suit. As I looked I saw her head move restlessly from side to side, and heard a little moan escape her. I was reminded of a sleepy, ailing child registering protest at being waked to take unpleasant-tasting medicine.

But not for long was this reluctance shown. Slowly, almost tentatively, like one who feels her cautious way through darkness, she put forth one exquisitely small foot and then the other, hesitated for a breath, then rose up from her couch, a smile of blissful joy upon her face. And though her eyes were closed, she seemed to see her path as she walked half-way across the room, then halted suddenly, stretched out her arms, then clasped them tightly, as though she never would let go of what she held. Head back, lips parted, she raised herself and stood on tiptoe, scarcely seeming to touch the floor. It was as if, by some sort of levitation, she were lifted up and really floated in the air, anchored to earth only by the pink-tipped toes of her small feet. Or was it not—my heart stood still as the thought crashed through my mind—was it not as though she yielded herself to the embrace of someone taller than herself, someone who clasped her in his arms, all but lifting her from her feet while he rained kisses on her yearning mouth?

A little, moaning gasp escaped her, and she staggered backward dizzily, still hugging something which we could not see against her breast, her every movement more like that of one who leaned upon another for support than one who walked unaided. She fell across the bed. Her eyes were still fast-shut, but she thrust her head a little forward, as though she seemed to see ecstatic visions through the lowered lids. Her plae cheeks flushed, her lips fell back in the sweet curve of an eager, avid smile. She raised her hands, making little downward passes before her face, as though she stroked the cheeks of one who leant above her, and a gentle tremor shook her slender form as her slim bosom seemed to swell and her lips opened and closed slowly, blissfully, in a pantomime of kissing. A deep sigh issued from between her milk-white teeth; then her breath came short and jerkily in quick exhausted gasps.

"Grand Dieu—l'incube!" de Grandin whispered. "See, my friend?"

"L'incube — incubus — nightmare? I should say so!" I exclaimed. "Quick, waken her, de Grandin; this sort of thing may lead to erotomania!"

"Be still!" he whispered sharply. "I did not say *an* incubus, but *the* incubus. This is no nightmare, my friend, it is a foul being from the world beyond who woos a mortal woman—observe, behold, *regardez-vous!*"

From Zita's side, three inches or so below the gentle prominence of her left breast, there came a tiny puff of smoke, as from a cigarette. But it was renewed, sustained, growing from a puff to a stream, from a stream to a column, finally mushrooming at the top to form a nebulous, white pompon which whirled and gyrated and seemed to spin upon its axis, growing larger and more solid-seeming with each revolution. Then the grayish-whiteness of the vapor faded, took on translucence, gradually became transparent, and like a soap-bubble of gi-

gantic size floated upward till it rested in the air a foot or so above the girl's ecstatic countenance.

And from the bubble looked a face—a man's face, evil as Mefisto's own, instinct with cruelty and lechery and wild, vindictive triumph. The features were coarse, gross, heavy; bulbous lips, not red, but rather purple as though gorged with blood; a great hooked nose, not aquiline, but rather reminiscent of a vulture; dank, matted hair which clung in greasy strands to a low forehead; deep-set, lack-luster eyes which burned like corpse-lights showing through the hollow sockets of a skull.

I started back involuntarily, but de Grandin thrust his hand into the pocket of his dinner coat and advanced upon the vision. "Gutter-spawn of hell," he warned, "be off. *Conjuro te; abire ad locum tuum!*" With a wrenching motion he drew forth a *flacon*, undid its stopper and hurled its contents straight against the gleaming bubble which encased the leering face.

The pearly drops of water struck the opalescent sphere as though it had been glass, some of them splashing on the sleeping girl, some adhering to the globe's smooth sides, but for all the effect they produced they might as well not have been thrown.

"Now, by the horns on Satan's head——" the Frenchman began furiously, but stopped abruptly as the globe began to whirl again. As though it had derived its roundness from winding up the end of the smoke-column issuing from Zita's side, so now it seemed that it reversed itself, becoming first oval as it turned, then elliptical, then long and sausage-shaped, finally merging with the trailing wisp of vapor which floated from the girl's slim trunk, and which, even as we watched, was steadily withdrawn until it lost itself in her white flesh.

Zita was lying on her back, her arms stretched out as though she had been crucified, her breath coming in hot, fevered gasps, tears welling from beneath the lashes of her lowered lids.

"Now, look at this, my friend," de Grandin ordered. "It was from here the vapor issued, was it not?"

He placed a finger over the girl's side, and as I nodded he drew a needle from his lapel and thrust it to the eye in her soft flesh. I cried aloud at his barbarity, but he silenced me with a quick gesture, parted the wide meshes of her lace pajamas and held the bedside lamp above the acupuncture. The steel was almost wholly fleshed in her side; yet not only did she not cry out, but there was no sign of blood about the point of incision. It might as well have been dead tissue into which he thrust the needle.

"Whatever are you doing?" I demanded furiously.

"Merely testing," he replied; then, contritely: "*Non*, I would not play with you, my friend. I did desire to assure myself of a local anesthesia at the point from which the ectoplasm issued. You know the olden story that witches and all those who sold themselves to Satan bore somewhere on their bodies an area insensible to pain. This was said to be because the Devil had possessed them. I shall not say it was not so; but what if the possession be involuntary, if the evil spirit of possession comes against the will of the possessed? Will there still be such local insensitive areas? I thought there would be. *Pardieu*, now I know. I have proved it!

"Now the task remains to us to devise some method of attack against this so vile miscreant. He has become as much physical as spiritual; consequently spir-

itual weapons are of little avail against him. Will the purely physical prevail, one wonders?"

"How d'ye mean?"

"Why, you saw what happened when I dashed the holy water on him—it did not seem to inconvenience him at all."

"But, good heavens, man," I argued, "how can that—whatever it was we saw—be both spiritual and physical? Doesn't it have to be one or the other?"

"Not necessarily," he answered. "You and I and all the rest of us are dually constructed: part physical body, part animating spirit. This unpleasant Czerni person was once the same, till Colonel Szekler killed him. Then he became wholly spirit, but evil spirit. And because he was a spirit he was powerless to work overt harm. He lacked a body for his evil work. Then finally came opportunity. At that cursed séance of Madame Claire's, Mademoiselle Zita was an ideal tool to work his wickedness. It is a well-recognized fact among Spiritualists that the adolescent girl is regarded as the ideal medium, where it is desired that the spirits materialize. For why? Because such girls' nerves are highly strung and their physical resistance weak. It is from such as these that imponderable, but nevertheless physical substance called ectoplasm is most easily ravished by the spirit desiring to materialize, to build himself a semi-solid body. Accordingly, Mademoiselle Zita was ideal for the vile Czerni's purpose. From her he drew the ectoplasm to materialize at Madame Claire's. When the ectoplasm flowed back to her, *he went with it.* This moment, Friend Trowbridge, he dwells within her, dominating her completely while she is asleep and the conscious mind is off its guard, drawing ectoplasm from her when he would make himself apparent. He can not do so often, she is not strong enough to furnish him the power for frequent materializations; but there he is, ever present, always seeking opportunity to injure her. We must cast him out, my friend, before he takes complete possession of her, and she becomes what the ancients called 'possessed of a devil'; what we call insane.

"Come, let us go. I do not think that he will trouble her again tonight, and I have much studying to do before we come to final grips, I and this so vile revenant of the Red Gauntlets."

4. Red Gauntlets of Czerni

"TROWBRIDGE, my friend, awake, arouse yourself; get up!" de Grandin's hail broke through my early-morning sleep. "Rise, dress, make haste, my friend; we are greatly needed!"

"Eh?" I sat up drowsily and shook the sleep from my eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Everything, by blue!" he answered. "It is Mademoiselle Zita. She is hurt, maimed, injured. They have taken her to Mercy Hospital. We must hurry.

"No, I can not tell you the nature of her injuries," he answered as we drove through the gray light of early dawn toward the hospital. "I only know that she is badly hurt. Colonel Szekler telephoned a few minutes ago and seemed in great distress. He said it was her hands——"

"Her hands?" I echoed. "How——"

"*Cordieu,* I said I do not know," he flashed back. "But I damn suspect, and if my suspicions are well founded we must hasten and arrive before it is too late."

"Too late for what?"

"Oh, *pour l'amour des porcs,* talk less, drive faster, if you please, great stupid one!" he shouted.

COLONEL SZEKLER, gray-faced as a corpse, awaited us in the hospital's reception room. *"Himmelkreuzsakrament,"* he swore through chattering teeth, "this is dreadful, unthinkable! My girl, my little Zita——" a storm of retching sobs choked further utterance, and he bowed his forehead on his arms and wept as though his heart were bursting.

"Courage, *Monsieur,"* de Grandin soothed. "All is not lost; tell us how it happened; what is it that befell *Mademoiselle——"*

"All isn't lost, you say?" Colonel Szekler raised his tear-scarred face, and the wolfish gleam in his eyes was so dreadful that involuntarily I raised my arm protectively. "All isn't lost, when my little girl is hopelessly deformed?—when *she wears the red gauntlets of Czerni?"*

"Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu, do you say it?" the Frenchman cried. "Attention, *Monsieur;* lay by your grief and tell me all—everything—immediately. There is not a moment to be wasted. I had the presentiment that this might be what happened, and I have made plans, but first I must know all. Speak, *Monsieur!* There will be time enough to grieve if our efforts prove futile. Now is the time for action."

Laying small, white hands upon the colonel's shoulders, he shook him almost as a dog might shake a rat, and the show of unexpected strength in one so small, no less than the physical violence, brought the colonel from his maze of grief.

"It was about three-quarters of an hour ago," he began. "I'd gone to Zita's room and found her resting peacefully; so, reassured, I lay down and fell asleep. Immediately, I began to dream. I was back in Buda-Pest again during the terror. Czerni was sitting in judgment on helpless victims of the Bolsheviki's vengeance. One after another they were brought before him, soldiers of the king, nobles, members of the *bourgeoisie*—children, old men, women, anyone and everyone who had fallen into the clutches of his rowdies of the Red Guard. Always the judgment was the same—death. As well might a lamb have looked for mercy from the wolf-pack as a member of our class seek clemency from that mockery of a court where Tibor Czerni sat in judgment.

"Then they brought Zita in. She stood before him, proud and silent, as became her ancient blood, not deigning to offer any defense to the accusation of counter-revolutionary activities which they brought against her. I saw Czerni's eyes light with lust as he looked at her, taking her in from head to foot with a lecherous glance that seemed to strip the garments from her body as he puckered up his gross, thick lips and smiled.

" 'The charges are not proved to my satisfaction,' he declared when all the accusations had been made. 'At least they are not sufficiently substantiated to merit the death sentence on this young lady. It would be a pity, too, to mar that pretty body with bullets or stretch that lovely throat out of proportion with the hangman's rope. Besides, I know her parents, her charming mother and her proud, distinguished father. I owe them something, and I must pay my debt. Therefore, for their sakes, if not for her own charming self, I order this young lady to be set at liberty.'

"I saw a look of incredulous relief sweep over Zita's face as he gave the order, but it was replaced by one of horror as he finished:

" 'Yes, comrades, set her free—but not until you've put red gauntlets on her!'

"And as I lay there gasping at the horror of my dream, I heard a laugh, high,

cachinnating, triumphant, and awoke with the echo of it in my ears. Then, as I was about to fall asleep again, thanking heaven that I only dreamt, I heard Zita's scream. Peal after peal of frenzied shrieks came from her room as she cried for mercy, called to me and her mother for help, then, becoming inarticulate, merely wailed in agony. As I ran headlong down the hall her screaming died away, and she was only moaning weakly when I reached her room.

"She lay across her bed, groaning in exhausted agony, like a helpless beast caught in the hunter's trap, and her hands were stretched straight out before her.

"Her hands — *Gott in Himmel,* no! Her stumps! Her hands were crushed to bloody pulp and hung upon her wrists like mops of shredded cloth, sopping with red stickiness. Blood was over everything, the bed, the rug, the pillows and her sleeping-suit, and as I looked at her I could see it spurting from the mangled flesh of her poor, battered hands with every palpitation of her pounding heart.

" 'This, too, is a dream,' I told myself, but when I crossed the room and touched her, I knew it was no dream. How it happened I don't know, but somehow, through some damned black magic, Tibor Czerni has been able to come back from that hell where his monstrous spirit waits throughout eternity and work this mischief to my child; to disfigure her beyond redemption and make a helpless cripple of her.

"There was little I could do. I got some dressings from the bathroom and bound her hands, trying my best to staunch the flow of blood, 'phoned to Mercy Hospital for an ambulance; finally called you. We are lost. Czerni has triumphed."

"WILL you sign this, sir?" the young intern, sick with revulsion at the ghastly phases of his trade, stepped almost diffidently into the reception room and presented a filled-in form to Colonel Szekler. "It's your authority as next of kin for the operation."

"Is it absolutely necessary—must they operate?" Colonel Szekler asked with a sharp intake of his breath.

"Good Lord, yes!" the young man answered. "It's dreadful, sir; I never saw anything like it. Doctor Teach will have to take both hands off above the carpus, he says——"

"Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur, but who will take what off above the which?" de Grandin interrupted. His voice was soft, but there was murderous fury flashing in his small blue eyes.

"Doctor Teach, sir; the chief surgeon. He's in the operating-room now, and as soon as Colonel Szekler signs this authorization——"

"Par la barbe d'un poisson, your youngest grandchild will have grown a long, white beard before that happens!" the Frenchman cried. "Give me that cursed, damned, abominable, execrable paper, if you please!" He snatched the form from the young doctor's hand and tore it into shreds. "Go tell Doctor Teach that I shall do likewise to him if he so much as lays a finger on her," he added.

"But you don't understand, this is an emergency case," the intern swallowed his anger, for Jules de Grandin's reputation as a surgeon had become a byword in the city's clinics, and my thirty years and more of practise had lent respectability, if nothing more, to my professional standing. "Just look at her card!"

From his pocket he produced a duplicate of the reception record, and I read across de Grandin's shoulder:

Right hand—Multiple fractures of carpus and

metacarpus; compound comminutive fractures of first, second and third phalanges; rupture of flexor and reflexor muscles; short abductor muscle severed; multiple contusions of thenar eminence; multiple ecchymoses . . .

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed as the detailed catalogue of injuries burned itself into my brain; "he's right, de Grandin: her hands are practically destroyed."

"Parbleu, so will that *sacrê* Doctor Teach be if he presumes to lay a hand on her!" he shot back fiercely; then, to Colonel Szekler:

"Retract your order of employment, *Monsieur,* I implore you. Tell them that they may not operate, at least until Doctor Trowbridge and I have had an opportunity to treat her. Do you realize what it means if that *sale* butcher is allowed to take her hands away?"

Colonel Szekler eyed him coldly. "I came to you in the hope of freeing her from the incubus that rested on her," he replied. "They told me you were skilled in such things, and had helped others. You failed me. Czerni's ghost took no more notice of your boasted powers than he did of the efforts of those medical fakers I'd called in. Now she is deformed, crippled past all hope of healing, and you ask another chance. You'd cure her? You haven't even seen her poor, crushed hands. What assurance have I that——"

"Monsieur," the little Frenchman broke in challengingly, "you are a soldier, are you not?"

"Eh? Yes, of course, but——"

"And you put the miscreant Czerni to death, *n'est-ce-pas?"*

"I did, but——"

"And you would not shrink from taking life again?"

"What——"

"Very good. I put my life in pawn for my success, *Monsieur!"* Reaching underneath his jacket he drew out the vicious little Ortgies automatic pistol cradled in its holster below his armpit and handed it to Colonel Szekler. "There are nine shots in it, *Monsieur,"* he said. "One will be enough to finish Jules de Grandin if he fails."

"BUT there isn't a chance; not a ghost of a chance, Trowbridge!" stormed Doctor Teach when we told him that the colonel had withheld permission for the operation. "I've seen de Grandin do some clever tricks in surgery — he's a good workman, I'll give him that—but anyone who holds out hope of saving that girl's hands is a liar or a fool or both. I tell you, it's hopeless; utterly hopeless."

"Do you drink, *Monsieur?"* de Grandin interjected mildly, apropos of nothing.

Doctor Teach favored him with a stare beside which that bestowed by Cotton Mather on a Salem witch would have been a lover's ardent glance. "I don't quite see it's any of your business," he answered coldly, "but as a matter of fact I do sometimes indulge."

"Ah, *bon, meilleur; mieux.* Let us wager. When all is done, let us drink glass for glass till one of us can drink no more, and if I save her hands you pay the score; if not, I shall. You agree?"

"You've an odd sense of humor, sir, jesting at a time like this."

"Ah, *mon Dieu,* hear him!" de Grandin cried as he rolled his eyes toward heaven. "As if good brandy could ever be a cause for jest!"

"WELL, you've got yourself into a nice fix, I must say!" I chided as we sat beside the cot where Zita Szekler lay, still drugged with morphine. "You've no more chance of saving this poor child's hands than I have of flying to the moon, and if I know anything of

human nature, Colonel Szekler will take you at your word when he finds you can't make good your promise, and shoot you like a dog. Besides, you've made me look ridiculous by seeming to back you in your insane——"

"S-s-st!" his sharp hiss shut me off. "Be quiet, if you please. I would think, and can not do so for your ceaseless jabbering."

He rose, went to the wall telephone and called the office. "Is all in readiness, exactly as I ordered?" he demanded. A pause; then: *"Bon, très bon, Mademoiselle;* have them bring the sweeper to this floor immediately, and have the saline solution all in readiness in the operating-room."

"What the deuce——" I began, but he waved me silent.

"I arranged for my *matériel de siège* while they were transporting her," he answered with a smile. "Now, if *Monsieur le Revenant* will only put in his appearance—ah, *parbleu,* what have we here? By damn, I think he does!"

The drugged girl on the bed began to stir and moan as though she suffered an unpleasant dream, and I became aware of a faint, unpleasant smell which cut through the mingled aroma of disinfectant and anesthetic permeating the hospital atmosphere. For a moment I was at a loss to place it; then, suddenly, I knew. Across the span of years my memory flew to the days of my internship, when I had to make my periodic visits to the city mortuary. That odor of decaying human flesh once smelled can never be forgotten, nor can all the deodorants under heaven quite drive it from the air.

And now the girl's soft breast was heaving tremulously, and her features were distorted by a faint grimace of suffering. Her brows drew downward, and along her cheeks deep lines were cut, as though she were about to weep.

"She's coming out of anesthesia," I warned; "shall I ring for a——"

"S-s-sst! Be quiet!" de Grandin commanded, leaning toward the writhing girl, his little eyes agleam, lips drawn back from his small, white teeth in a smile which was more than half a snarl.

Slowly, almost tentatively, a little puff of gray-white, smoke-like substance issued from the moaning girl's left side, grew larger and denser, whirled spirally above her, seemed to blossom into something globular—a big and iridescent bubble-thing in which the pale, malignant features of the incubus took form.

"Now for the test, by blue!" de Grandin murmured fiercely.

With a leap he crossed the room, swung back the door and jumped across the threshold to the corridor, reappearing in the twinkling of an eye with — of all things!—*a vacuum sweeper* in his hand. He set the mechanism going with a quick flick of the trigger, and as the sharp, irritable whine of the motor sounded, sprang across the room, paused a moment by the bed and thrusting his hand beneath his jacket drew forth his heavy Kukri knife and passed it with a slashing motion above the girl's stiff, quivering form. The steel sheared through the ligament of tenuous, smoke-like matter connecting the gleaming bubble-globe to Zita's side, and as the sphere raised itself, like a toy balloon released from its tether, he brought the nozzle of the vacuum cleaner up, caught the trailing, gray-white wisp of gelatinous substance which swung pendent in the air and—sucked it in.

The droning motor halted in its vicious hornet-whine, as though the burden he had placed on it were more than it could cope with; then, sharply, spitefully, began to whir again, and, bit by struggling

bit, the trail of pale, pellucid stuff was sucked into the bellows of the vacuum pump.

A look of ghastly fright and horror shone upon the face within the bubble. The wide mouth opened gaspingly, the heavy-lidded eyes popped staringly, as though a throttling hand had been laid on the creature's unseen throat, and we heard a little whimpering sound, so faint that it was scarcely audible, but loud enough to be identified. It was like the shrieking of someone in mortal torment heard across a stretch of miles.

"Ha—so? And you would laugh at Jules de Grandin's face, *Monsieur?*" the little Frenchman cried exultantly. "You would make of him one louse-infested monkey? Yes? *Parbleu,* I damn think we shall see who makes a monkey out of whom before our little game is played out to a finish. But certainly!

"Ring the bell, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded me. "Bid them take her to the operating room and infuse a quart of artificial serum by hypodermoclysis. Doctor Brundage is in readiness; he knows what to do.

"Now, come with me, if you would see what you shall see," he ordered as I made the call. "Leave *Mademoiselle* with them; they have their orders."

Twisting the connecting hose of the vacuum cleaner into a sharp V, he shut the current off; then, always the urbane Parisian, he motioned me to precede him through the door.

Down to the basement we hastened, and paused by the great furnace which kept the building well supplied with boiling water. He thrust the cleaner's plug into an electric wall fixure and: "Will you be kind enough to open up that door?" he asked, nodding toward the furnace and switching on the power in his motor.

As the machine once more began to hum he pressed the trigger sharply downward, reversing the motor and forcing air from the cleaner's bellows. There was a short, sharp, sputtering cough, as though the mechanism halted in its task, then a labored, angry groaning of the motor as it pumped and pumped against some stubborn obstacle. Abruptly, the motor started racing, and like a puff of smoke discharging from a gun, a great gray ring shot from the cleaner's nozzle into the superheated air of the furnace firebox. For an instant it hovered just above the gleaming, incandescent coals; then with an oddly splashing sound it dropped upon the fire-bed, and a sharp hissing followed while a cloud of heavy steam arose and spiraled toward the flue. I sickened as I smelled the acrid odor of incinerating flesh.

"*Très bien.* That, it appears, is that," announced de Grandin as he shut the motor off and closed the furnace door with a well-directed kick. "Come, let us go and see how Mademoiselle Zita does. They should be through with the infusion by this time."

5. *Release*

ZITA SZEKLER lay upon her bed, her bandaged hands upon her bosom. Whether she was still under anesthesia or not I could not tell, but she seemed resting easily. Also, strangely, there was not the dreadful pallor that had marked her when we left; instead, her cheeks were faintly, though by no means feverishly, flushed and her lips were healthy pink.

"Why, this is incredible," I told him. "She's been through an experience fit to make a nervous wreck of her, the pain she suffered must have been exquisite, she's had extensive hemorrhages; yet——"

"Yet you forget that Doctor Brundage

pumped a thousand cubic centimeters of synthetic serum into her, and that such heroic measures are almost sovereign in case of shock, collapse, hemorrhage or coma. No, my friend, she lost but little blood, and what she lost was more than compensated by the saline infusion. It was against the loss of life-force I desired to insure her, and it seems the treatment was effective."

"Life-force? How do you mean?"

He grinned his quick, infectious elfin grin and, regardless of institutional prohibitions, produced a rank-smelling "Maryland" and set it glowing. "Ectoplasm," he replied laconically.

"Ec—what in the world——"

"*Précisément, exactement,* quite so," he answered with another grin. "Regard me, if you please: This Czerni person's soul was earthbound, as we know. It hung about the Szekler house, ever seeking opportunity for mischief, but it could accomplish little; for immaterial spirits, lacking physical co-operation of some sort, can not accomplish physical results. At last there came the chance when Madame Szekler induced her husband and child to attend that séance. Mademoiselle Zita was ill, nervous, run down, not able to withstand her assaults. Not only was he able to force himself into her mind to make her do his bidding, but he was able to withdraw from her the ectoplasmic force which supplied him with a body of a kind.

"This ectoplasm, what is it? We do not surely know, any more than we know what electricity is. But in a vague way we know that it is a solidification of the body's emanations. How? Puff out your breath. You can not see it, but you know that something vital has gone out of you. Ah, but if the temperature were low enough, you could not only feel your breath, you could see it, as well. So, when conditions are favorable, the ectoplasm, at other times unseen, becomes visible. Not only that, by a blending of the spiritual entity with its physical properties, it can become an almost-physical body. A materialization, we should call it, a 'manifestation' the Spiritists denominate it.

"Why did he do this? For two reasons. First, he craved a body of some sort again; by materializing, he could make himself seen by Colonel Szekler, whom he desired to plague. He had become a sort of semi-human once again, so far physical that physical means had to be taken to combat him.

"Last night, when I flung the holy water on him, and nothing happened, I said, *'Mon Dieu,* I am lost!' Then I counseled me, 'Jules de Grandin, do not be dismayed. If holy things are unavailing, it is because he has become physical, though not corporeal, and you must use physical weapons to combat him.'

" 'Very good, Jules de Grandin, it shall be that way,' I say to me.

"Thereupon I planned my scheme of warfare. He was too vague, too subtle, too incorporeal to be killed to death with a sword or pistol. The weapons would cut through him, but do him little harm. 'Ah, but there is always one thing that will deal with such as he,' I remind me. 'Fire, the cleansing fire, regarded by the ancients as an element, known by the moderns as the universal solvent.'

"But how to get him to the fire? I could not bring the fire to him, for fear of hurting Mademoiselle Zita. I could not take him to the fire, for he would take refuge in her body if I attempted to seize him. Then I remembered: When he materialized in her room the bubble which enclosed his evil face wavered in the air.

" 'Ah-ha, my evil one,' I say, 'I have

you at the disadvantage. If you can be blown by the wind you can be sucked by an air-current. It is the vacuum sweeper which shall be your hearse to take you to the crematory. Oh, yes.'

"So then I know that we must lie in wait for him with our vacuum sweeper all in readiness. It may take months to catch him, but catch him we shall, eventually. But there is another risk. We must sever his materialized form from Mademoiselle Zita's body, and we can not put the ectoplasm back. And so I decide that we must have some saline solution ready to revive her from the shock of losing all that life-force. This seemed a condition which could not be overcome, but this wicked Czerni, by his very wickedness, provided us with the solution of our problem. By injuring Mademoiselle Zita, he made them bring her to this hospital, the one place where we should have everything ready to our hand—the sweeper, the fire which should consume him utterly, the saline solution and facilities for its quick administration. *Eh bien,* my friend, but he did us the favor, that one."

"But her hands, man, her hands," I broke in. "How——"

"It is a stigma," he replied.

"A stigma—how—what——"

"Perfectly. You understand the phenomenon of stigmata? It is akin to hypnotism. In the psychological laboratory you have seen it, but by a different name. The hypnotist can bid his subject's blood run from his hand, and the hand becomes pale and anemic; you have seen the blood transferred from one arm to another; you have seen what appears to be a wound take form upon the skin without external violence, merely the command of the hypnotist.

"Now, this Czerni had complete possession of Mademoiselle Zita's mind while she slept. He could make her do all manner of things, think of all manner of things, feel all manner of things. He had only to give her the command: 'Your hands have been beaten to a pulp, smashed by merciless mauls upon a chopping-block — you are wearing the red gauntlets!' and, to all intents, what he said became a fact. Just as the scientific hypnotist makes his subject's blood reverse itself against the course of nature, just as he makes what appears to be a bleeding cut appear upon uninjured skin —then heals it with a word—so could Czerni make Mademoiselle Zita's hands take on the appearance of wearing the red gauntlets without the use of outside force. Only a strong will, animated by a frightful hate, and operating on another will whose resistance had completely broken down could do these things; but do them he did. Yes.

"When Colonel Szekler told me how his daughter became red-gauntleted while lying in her bed, where she could not possibly have been injured by external force, I knew that this was what had happened, and so sure was I of my diagnosis that I staked my life upon it. Now——"

"You're crazy!" I broke in.

"We shall see," he answered with a smile, crossed to the bed and placed a second pillow under Zita's head, so that she was almost in a sitting posture.

"Mademoiselle," he called softly while he stroked her forehead gently, "Mademoiselle Zita, can you hear me?" He pressed his thumbs transversely on her brow, drawing them slowly outward with a stroking motion, then, with fingers on her temples, bore his thumbs against her throat below the ears. *"Mademoiselle,"* he ordered in a low, insistent voice, "it is I, Jules de Grandin. I am the master of your thought, you can not think or act

or move without my permission. Do you hear?"

"I hear," she answered in a sleepy voice.

"And you obey?"

"And I obey."

"Très bon. I bid you to forget all which the evil Czerni told you; to unlock your mind from the prison of his dominance—to restore your hands to their accustomed shape. Your hands are normal, unharmed in any way; they have never been scarred or hurt, not even scratched.

"Mademoiselle, in what condition are your hands?"

"They are normal and uninjured," she replied.

"Bien! Triomphe! Now, let us see."

With a pair of surgical shears he cut away the bandages. I held my breath as he drew away the gauze, but I wondered as the lower layers were drawn apart and showed no stain of blood.

The final layer was off. Zita Szekler's hands lay on the counterpane, smooth, white, pink-tipped, without a mark, or scar, or blemish.

"Merciful heavens!" I exclaimed. "This is a miracle, no less.

"Here, I say, de Grandin, where are you going, to call Colonel Szekler?"

"Not I," he answered with a chuckle. "Do you call him, good Friend Trowbridge. Me, I go to find that cocksure-of-his-diagnosis Doctor Teach and make him pay his wager.

"Morbleu, how I shall enjoy drinking him beneath the table!"

The Ox-Cart

By FRANK OWEN

A bizarre fantasy about an aged Chinaman who went back hundreds of years into the past to find love

AS JOHN STEPPLING sat resting by the Chinese roadside, an old man driving an ox-cart suddenly loomed into view. As he came abreast of Steppling, the old man called to the oxen to stop. Then he gazed down meditatively at the American who loitered by the wayside. So keen was the old man's scrutiny, that Steppling for a moment was disconcerted. He had the queer feeling that the old man was looking right into his mind, as though he could read his very thoughts. The man was thin and shrunken with age. His bloodless, brown cheeks were like parchment spread over sharp bones with no interlining of flesh. A chance wind might have blown him away. He seemed older than a parched autumn leaf. Yet his eyes were not old. They seemed to flame. They were of terrific brilliance. Steppling could think of no milder term to describe them.

And the old man said in a voice so low that it was scarcely audible, "My name is Huang Ti and I can see there is nothing in your mind that prevents us from being friends. Since you are tired, get into my cart and we can talk as the ox-cart rolls along the road that is nobody knows how old."

"Her glowing silver body was a gem of rarest worth."

"Thanks," said Steppling, and at once he climbed into the cart beside the ancient stranger. Even as he did so he was surprized at his own action. It was almost as though some mind other than his own controlled his action. He was curious but not worried. Steppling's whole life had been devoted to adventure. He was interested in odd countries, odd people, odd things.

"My name is John Steppling," he said, as the oxen ambled slowly along their way.

"I know," said the old man simply.

"How did you know?" gasped Steppling in unfeigned astonishment.

And the old man said, "How do we know anything? When the first few people dwelt upon the earth, how did they know that that ball of fire bursting in the east and flowing over the horizon was the sun? And when the day had passed and darkness fell like a blot upon the earth, what was their reaction to that? Who invented love and war? Who invented happiness and laughter? Whence came religion, science, philosophy and man's power to reason? At what point in his-

tory did justice start to flower? Why, my friend, man is still an infant. He doesn't know what holds the universe in place, nor does he have the faintest idea of the true position he occupies in it. He imagines he is little less than a god, made in the image of the almighty God. But he seldom stops to consider the pattern that God was fashioned after. Is the supreme God that governs the earth but one of numerous gods that govern the universe? And is the universe one? Or is it one of many? Why, man doesn't even know how to measure space. He does not understand time. He is constantly overcome by love."

Steppling looked at the aged Huang Ti in amazement. "Tell me," he said, impulsively, "where were you educated?"

"Along the highways of China," was the reply. "It was very simple. I merely studied the endless sea of humanity that flowed past me. I had ample time to study, for I have lived a thousand years."

Now Steppling was sure the old man was mad, yet there was nothing in his soft, gentle voice that proclaimed insanity.

"That is hard to believe," he commented.

"A fact is a hardy flower," mused Huang Ti. "It flourishes whether it is believed or not. What would you say if I told you my house is so old that it has become rooted in the soil or that I live three hundred years away from here?"

The old fellow did not wait for an answer but went right on speaking.

"People of earth do not know how to live. They live only in the future. They endeavor to forget the past. Yet the past is ours, for we own it. We can return to it whenever we wish. No scene that we live through ever vanishes. It remains in our memory guarded by a closed door. The door is unlocked and we can return to the scene whenever we wish.

"But the future belongs to no man. It is doled out to us a day at a time. Yet never can we grasp it. Ever it remains beyond our finger tips. This cart, these oxen, are almost as old as I am. One ox is white, one black, symbolic of day and night if you wish to see symbolism in it. But actually there is something odder than that about this equipage. The cart is immortal. So am I, so are the oxen. At least in a thousand years we have not died.

"Do not protest at my suggesting that the cart has a soul. Of course those things we call inanimate really live. A house takes on the personality of its owner. A garden echoes the lovely women that pass through it. The flowers reflect their grace. And do you know why the cart has achieved immortality? I will tell you. A thousand years ago I was driving down an unfrequented road at night after the sun had gone over the far hills to die. It was a strange night. There was no moon, but the sky was light with stars. It almost seemed to be raining stars. The heavens were in confusion and one of the star flowers fell to the ground and brushed against my cart. We were splashed by star-dust, the pollen of immortality."

Despite the fact that the old man evidently suffered from hallucinations, Steppling found his speech immensely interesting. His voice was cultured, and so low that it sounded like the echo of a bell. He was amazed that Huang Ti spoke English faultlessly.

When he mentioned the matter, Huang Ti smiled. "When one has lived a thousand years, one has leisure to study all languages. As my cart wended its way peacefully along this road that is nobody knows how old, I spent many hours in study. I have gazed on life from every angle. I have devoted long years to

meditating over the foibles of mankind. But you seem to overlook the most important part of my story. The fact that I speak English is inconsequential. The thing that should astound you is that even now you are riding back with me into yesterday. Time, years, days, are relatively of small importance compared to the age of the stars or the sun. Can you not perceive how the years are falling from me? Can you not perceive that I am recapturing my youth again?"

STEPPLING looked searchingly at Huang Ti's face. He meant to humor the old man. Instead he ejaculated a cry of astonishment. For now the parchment skin had taken on new color. Flesh seemed to have formed between the skin and bones. Even as he stared, he could almost see the change take place. Huang Ti was growing young and handsome. Even his clothes were gradually changing. The oxen had taken on new energy. For the first time they quickened their pace as though they had been revitalized. Was it hypnotism, or mesmerism? Whatever the cause, it was a distinct novelty to be hold.

Once more Huang Ti was speaking. And now his voice was much stronger and higher pitched.

"Have you ever seen this road before?"

"Never," admitted Steppling. "It is utterly strange. Yet I thought I was familiar with the country for miles about."

"But are you familiar with this country hundreds of years ago?"

"Of course not."

"In my cart," said Huang Ti, "slowly you are going back through the centuries. Time has ceased to be the foolish thing men have tried to make it. An hour forward in your language is sixty minutes: sixty minutes to be lived. But an hour back is but a fleeting second. There is nothing to hold time in check in retrospection. Therefore now we are speeding back through the centuries even though apparently the oxen are merely jogging along at an even pace. In you, no change is being recorded because you do not belong in that past to which I am taking you. So your physical appearance is unaltered. You are merely a spectator of a past that is no concern of yours. But to me it is different. See how my youth is returning."

And so it was. Now Huang Ti seemed no older than Steppling himself, and Steppling was not much over thirty. If Huang Ti was mad, then he was mad too, for he was seeing the things which Huang Ti wanted him to see. And now the cart had stopped before a large house. It was only one story high, but it covered a vast area of ground and stood in the center of a lovely garden.

"Before proceeding farther," began Huang Ti, "it is fitting that I should tell you a few more salient facts about my history. I was born in the year 929 in that period of Chinese legend which is known as the Five Dynasties. My father was wealthy—a merchant who dealt in jewels and fine paintings. I was educated to all the arts: poetry, calligraphy, painting in all its branches, on silk, on porcelain and on fans. Frequently I wrote songs to the peonies, which I sang as I walked through the garden surrounding my father's house, when the moon hung low in the sky and the trees reached out to catch it in their branches and the air was heavy with romance.

"Often I left the garden dressed in simple peasant clothes and walked down the lonely road, singing my songs or inventing sonnets to the willows that nodded to me as I passed. You must know that every place is a different place at night. Night is the time of dreams

and illusions. Night thoughts are far more beautiful than those of the day. They are made fragile by the stars, and it happened as such things do happen that one night I came upon a small hut by the roadside, the house of a rice farmer who lived with his daughter beside the field in which he was toiling his life away.

"The farmer was poor but he was contented. He had never desired much. A bowl of rice, a place to rest his head, an occasional opium pipe to smoke and dream. But his daughter Li-La was of different stuff. She was gorgeous. Her hair was blacker than jungle shadows. Her teeth were pearls. Her lips were as vividly red as though cherries had been crushed against them, and when she smiled even the flowers trembled.

"On the night when I first beheld her she was bathing nude in a pond under the mirror of the moon. Her glowing silver body was a gem of rarest worth. It was fire and it ignited an answering flame in my heart. That night I sang of perfume, of young love and spring; of the perfume of her sweet breasts on which I yearned to lay my head; of the love which had swung a bridge between us; of the springtime of our love which promised a golden summer.

"And Li-La heard me. My song became entangled in her heart even as the moonbeams were entangled in her lovely hair. Without heat or hurry she dressed in her simple garments and came toward me. I took her into my arms, and the moon spun a web of romance and glory about us and made us one.

"That night we were wedded by the moon. Until the dawn I held her in my arms on the warm bed of earth. And as the doors of the East opened in splendor and the sun came bursting through, she crept back to her house. And I returned to my father's roof in a perfumed dream of azure.

"Now indeed was I a poet. That night I had written lines more beautiful than I had ever fashioned. My love for Li-La was sheerest poetry. When we lay in each other's arms even the moon seemed to burst forth into melody. Only those doubly blessed by the gods ever hear moon-chants, the rarest of all music. It intoxicates. It drives one mad. Perhaps that is why Li-La and I went mad with ecstasy under the lantern moon.

"After that my life seemed to flow in a manner magical, nor could I control the direction of the current. I bought these oxen and this cart to visit Li-La so that she might believe that I was only a farmer like her father.

"I should say here that Li-La was brought up by parents who did not believe in bound feet, nor did they believe in hiding their daughter away from strangers. They needed her to work in the fields, and as she walked with her bare feet in the soil she drew loveliness from the earth even as do flowers and young trees. The earth was kind to her. When her mother ceased to breathe and departed to join her ancestors, Li-La became mistress of the house and her freedom was complete. She held her father completely under her spell. He idolized her. In his eyes, Li-La could do no wrong. Each night in my ox-cart I went to visit her home until that night never to be forgotten when the moon lay hidden under a blue velvet blanket and the stars dashed madly about the sky, holding carnival, and occasionally losing their grip on the heavens and coming crashing, shrieking to earth. And as I have said, one lovely star fell in the path of my cart and we were sprinkled with the lovely dust. Thus did we gain immortality,

through the soft, glowing dust of the heavens.

"It was a divine moment and I sighed in ecstasy. But it was not until some time later that I knew that I would live for centuries. This knowledge came to me in a vision while I slept, but it is not necessary for me to dwell upon that at this moment. Suffice it to say that that night Li-La was more beautiful than ever. She nestled in my arms while I sang my willow songs.

"After that it was impossible to leave her. I lingered once more in the warm bed of earth almost till dawn.

"I WANTED Li-La to marry me but she refused to leave her father. Then it was that I told her of my boundless wealth. I persuaded my father to visit the farmer and offer him a job as head gardener in his household. Thus all obstacles were wiped away and in a simple ceremony one night in the shadow of the moon, Li-La and I were married. It was then that a strange thing happened. I found that I was bound to my cart. Even though at night I enjoyed the love of my wife, by day some unknown urge forced me to drive the cart along the road that is nobody knows how old. And each day I went farther on my journey. Li-La grew farther and farther away from me.

"Sometimes my jaunt in the cart took a year or two. Once it was five years as time is measured by men. Then I stayed away a full century. And when I returned to her side she spurned me, for I had suddenly become an old man. I was living through the ages. I was immortal. But she was living slowly her pitiful little span of years.

"At last she refused to see me when I entered the garden. She knew me no more. To her I appeared like an old beggar. My cheeks were so gaunt it made her shudder. By my becoming immortal, by my living through the ages, time became of so little importance to me that years sped by like minutes and I could not enjoy those few hours, months, years of life which I would have been destined to spend by Li-La's side if the dust of the stars had not made me immortal. I was like a god and yet I felt like shrieking in anguish.

"For centuries I pondered over my dilemma, and now at last I have solved my problem. I am not permitted to enter the garden. Yet I must have Li-La once more. I can not live in the past with her; but if I could bring her up through the centuries to the present age, she could live with me. There is still some of the star-dust lying in this cart, and if I could entice her to ride with me I could sprinkle a bit upon her. Then she too would be immortal. But there is only one way of accomplishing my purpose. That is why I have brought you back to this garden that was planted a thousand years ago.

"You must go into that garden. You must find Li-La. You must bring her out to my cart. How this is to be accomplished without causing commotion I can not say, but I suggest you creep into the garden in the hush of the night, when everyone is sleeping. I will direct you to her room. She sleeps beside an open window so that the perfume of the garden may sweep through her room as she slumbers. Li-La is of such loveliness that occasionally a rose blows into her room on the crest of the wind that it may lie in ecstasy on her bosom. Will you help me?"

"Of course I will," agreed Steppling. He felt as though he were living in a dream, as though he too were but a shadow in the dream. He no longer doubted Huang Ti's story, despite its fantastic details.

HUANG TI drove the oxen a half-mile or so down the road to a clump of trees. And as the oxen drowsed in the shade of the trees and nibbled bits of grass and fallen leaves, he conversed with John Steppling on a variety of subjects for the remainder of the day. It seemed almost no time at all before darkness closed down over the countryside and the whispering in the trees grew still. And of all the things they talked about as they waited by the roadside, it was death that impressed John Steppling the most.

"Death is one of life's greatest blessings," mused Huang Ti, "but we do not appreciate it because it is thrust upon us. It is sleep, it is rest. And if man is really born again as many mystics believe, then he still has death to look forward to at the end of life. Life is day, death is night. Hush, silence, peace. And no matter how many reincarnations there may be, death holds out its arms to draw one to its breast. I who have lived a thousand years can well understand what a blessing death is. It is the one thing beyond my finger tips, the one thing I can not grasp. It is the future. It is always beckoning like a false woman."

IN THE deep of the night John Steppling crept into the gaden. Huang Ti had explained fully the course he was to take. His footfalls were silent. They made no echo above the murmuring of the trees. Perhaps the trees knew that John Steppling was a messenger of love, and because they were in accord with his wishes, they set up that soft singing to drown out all other sounds.

And now Steppling had arrived before the open window of Li-La's room. A single blue lantern was burning in a corner. He was glad. At least he could find his way about.

It took him but a moment to climb into the room. A few steps and he was beside the divan on which the lovely Li-La was sleeping.

Her night attire was a gown of sheerest silk. It brought out all the grace and loveliness of her form. Every detail of her lovely body was disposed before him, a revelation of perfume and beauty. So lovely she was that the room seemed to sway. In that moment, love swept over him like a mist. Reverently he stooped and kissed the lush red lips. He was mad, drunk: drunk with beauty. Then reality returned to him. If Huang Ti's story was correct this girl was living in an age a thousand years ago. He felt as though his reason was snapping. The fragrance of that room was more deadly than opium fumes. To remain was madness. What was to become of him if Huang Ti despaired of his returning and drove the cart away?

With a mighty effort of will, he shook off the spell. Tears streamed down his face. He was afraid, mortally afraid; afraid of love; afraid of the crushing centuries that might sweep him to his doom. He picked up a long silk kimono from the cushions beside the divan. Then gently he took the form of Li-La up in his arms; gently, gently. She sighed, but she did not awaken. One shell-like hand brushed his lips. The window was wide and low, and even with his sweet burden he had no trouble in climbing out into the garden. He walked slowly, carrying that precious girl. The fragrance of her body was greater than the fragrance of the flowers. She scarcely seemed to weigh anything, so tiny and slender she was. He lingered as long as he dared in the garden, holding that exquisite girl to his breast. All the love of his life seemed surging from him at that moment.

When they reached the cart, Huang Ti helped to lift Li-La into the seat beside

him. As he did so, he sprinkled something over her body that shone and glistened like the dust of diamonds.

"Now nothing shall part us," he said tensely.

WITHOUT a word John Steppling climbed into the cart beside them. He felt desolated, cold, as though the fire of his life had burned out. He closed his eyes wearily, nor did he even glance up as Huang Ti called to the oxen and they started back on the dust-caked road that is nobody knows how old. And as Steppling sat moodily thinking, the years slipped by like minutes, and so the centuries passed.

He was recalled from his lethargy by the shrill voice of a woman. Li-La had awakened from her sleep. She was protesting at being forced to ride in the cart. Her voice was high-pitched, off key, harsh. Steppling glanced into her face, and recoiled with horror. Gone was her beauty. Now Li-La was an old woman, with protruding cheek-bones and colorless dried skin. Her hair was thin and scanty. Her eyes had sunken far into their sockets. Her throat was scrawny. Gone was every vestige of loveliness.

Huang Ti too had grown old and gray once more. He crouched on his corner of the seat and smiled at Steppling.

"My friend," he whispered, "you have done me a great service. You have given Li-La back to me. Now she, too, is immortal. Did you not see me sprinkle what remained of the star-dust upon her? Now, she, too, is a thousand years old."

As Huang Ti spoke, Li-La uttered such a piercing shriek that it froze Steppling's blood to ice. With a spring like a tiger, she was at his throat. Her long bony fingers were like the talons of a hawk. She gripped Steppling's throat and laughed like a fiend. Her sharp nails bit into his flesh like fangs. In desperation, he clutched at the silk kimono she was wearing. One sleeve broke loose, ripped from the body of the cloak.

Huang Ti raised his whip and crashed it down not once but many times about the shoulders of his beloved. So stinging were the blows that they cut into her flesh like knives. Her grip relaxed on Steppling's throat. Breathless, senseless, he fell from the cart onto the grass that grew by the old road's edge.

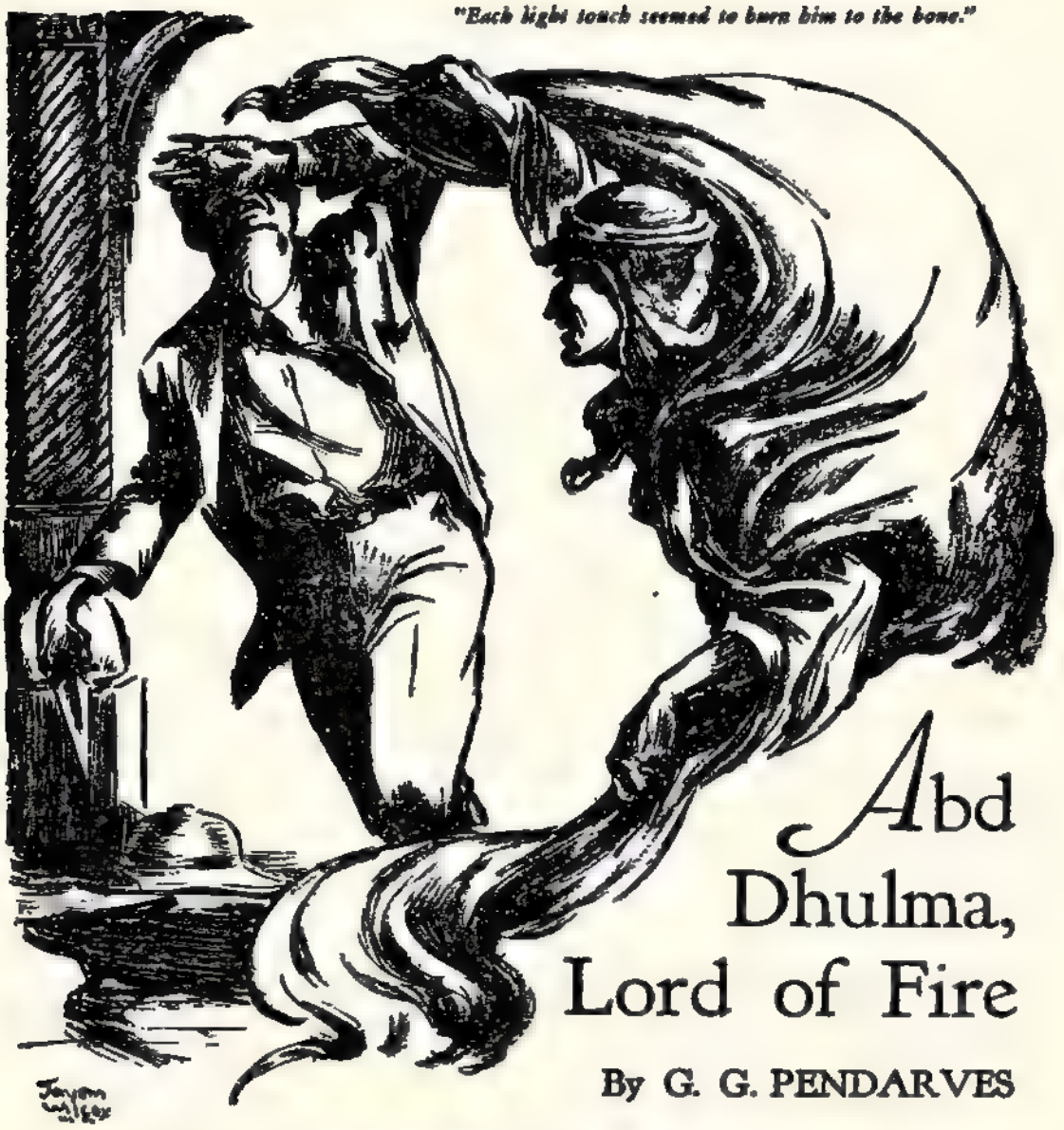
When Steppling awakened, he imagined that he must have been dreaming. His head ached dully. Perhaps he had succumbed to a touch of sun. Gradually memory returned to him. He remembered the lovely Li-La sleeping by the window opening onto the garden. Then he shuddered as he recalled the frightful transformation that had come over her. Then he laughed shortly.

"It was all a bad dream," he said.

In the distance he imagined he could see an ancient ox-cart disappearing over the far hills.

"Hallucinations," he spat out.

As he spoke he put his hand to his throat. When he drew it away there were spots of blood on his fingers from the wounds that Li-La's claw-like fingers had made. And in his other hand was the silken sleeve which had ripped out of her kimono.



"Each light touch seemed to burn him to the bone."

Abd Dhulma, Lord of Fire

By G. G. PENDARVES

A weird and shivery story of an evil Arab who contrived to postpone death for many centuries

BLIND! Warren Glenn turned his bandaged head restlessly on the silken cushions of the divan where he lay. Blind! Blind! Blind!

The word rang in his consciousness like a deep-toned bell, whose brazen note made every nerve of his lean body quiver. It seemed to him the bell was sounding just overhead, making everything in the hushed and perfumed courtyard vibrate from roof to tessellated pavement.

Blind! After fifteen years of seeking, the cruel insatiable desert had struck him down in the hour of his triumph. He had found his treasure at last, and, in payment for the secrets he had discovered and taken from her age-old keeping, the desert had robbed him of his sight.

Blind! Blind! Blind! rang that remorseless tocsin overhead. A long bitter sigh escaped him, and a familiar Arab plaint rose to his lips. He was startled by hearing a voice answer his muttered words.

"Wherefore, *sidi,* art thou weary of thy being? Despair should be the portion of no man, since there is a remedy and a healing for every ill under the sun."

Warren moved his head in the direction of the voice, amazed by the liquid beauty of the syllables, and instantly aware of its quality of power and command. In some strange way the voice made him uneasy; there was a deep vibrating undertone in its music that he could not understand. He wondered for a moment why a servant had not announced the visitor, as usual, but that thought was instantly submerged in the peculiar interest he felt in this stranger who had invaded his privacy.

"You are a healer?" he answered. "A native of Kufra, who has heard of my blindness, perhaps?"

"In the *souks* here all men speak of thine affliction, *sidi,*" the voice resumed. "I, who am known as Saiehh, the world-wanderer, have heard on every hand of the white man from the New World across the sea who has the gift of tongues and loves and understands the people of my race as if he were one of them. All men speak in praise and sorrow concerning thee, *sidi,* and therefore I am come to offer thee the gift of sight again."

"The gift of sight!" gasped Warren, for a moment on the verge of believing such a boon was possible. "No, no!" he went on, as the experience of the last few weeks rushed back to contradict the warm quickening of hope in his breast. "No, it is impossible! I have had advice from every one that money could bring here. They all agree. I am blind for life."

"No, *sidi,*" pursued the calm, assured voice. "I can restore sight to your eyes. This I say without even examining them. If it is your will, permit me to remove the bandage and tell you how long the cure will take."

Warren's pulses throbbed. How utterly absurd of him to allow the faintest hope to disturb him again; it only made the thing harder to bear. How many times during the last weeks he had hoped against hope as each new man spent his skill on him; and how many times he had been plunged into a blacker darkness!

"No!" he said at last. "No, I can not face that ordeal again. I don't wish to be discourteous, but will you leave me now? This is one of my bad days when I'm not fit company for any man. You wish to help me, but it is no use—no use."

"I understand." The voice was completely unruffled. "Yet, now that I am here, it would be well that you should not allow your resentment of others' mistakes to make your mind as unseeing as your eyes, *sidi.* I say that I can give you the gift of sight."

The voice was nearer now, close to the divan where Warren lay. He put out a hand and it was instantly taken in a clasp so strong and life-giving, so vibrant with power and warmth that Warren's strained features relaxed into a smile.

"And now I will take off this bandage."

THE strong sensitive fingers relaxed their grip and moved deftly about the blind man's head; the bandage was slipped off, and Warren felt a touch light as the fall of a leaf on his burning eyelids.

"It is as I thought, *sidi.*" The voice broke a long silence at last. "I have wrought many cures more desperate. Within the compass of a few hours I can work this healing on you. Tomorrow you

shall see the sun shine in the streets of Kufra, and the moon silver the palms at night once more—if you are willing to pay the price I ask."

"Pay!" echoed Warren. "There is nothing I would not pay to see again. I would strip myself of my last *mejedie* in exchange for my eyesight."

"The white man thinks ever in terms of gold. I do not traffic with a child's playthings thus. I have other standards, other measurements of value."

The voice was mocking now, and Warren seemed to feel the pressure of incalculable forces closing in upon him.

"What do you mean?" he asked, unpleasantly shaken by that brief sensation. "What is the price you ask?"

The voice countered his question by another.

"Life is valueless to you without your sight?"

"Completely valueless," agreed Warren. "If I can not work, I can not live in any real sense. My knowledge without sight is useless. My researches are intricate and involved beyond hope of teaching them, even to the most patient and skilled of assistants."

On the verge of divulging the extraordinary nature of the manuscripts he had recently discovered in the Tomb of the Sultan Izzad ben Kari, Warren checked himself. He was amazed at the impulse which this stranger seemed to be forcing upon his mind—an impulse to tell the secrets which he had so far disclosed to none.

That night in the desert, following his great discovery, he had only had time to glance at the precious records as he sat poring over the manuscripts from sunset to sunrise, his torch like a lost star in the vast immensity of sand about the Tomb, while his men slept in utter exhaustion. He knew that the yellowed parchments contained all he had ever dreamed of finding—the lost wisdom of the Magi who dominated the Ancient World, the supreme and secret Magic antedating the Flood and believed to have been destroyed in the fall of Babylon.

Warren, however, had believed otherwise ever since as a student at Harvard he had discovered the little battered volume in Sanskrit which had shaped his whole life.

The book was a most curious history of the life of a certain Sultan Izzad ben Kari who lived in the Eighth Century. The Sultan had been the dupe and disciple of Abd Dhulma, a priest of that day who had acquired the ancient wisdom and used it for his own ends. Abd Dhulma appeared to have been a false Magus, a Zoroastrian of the most debased and terrible character, and the little book asserted that he had found the secret of perpetuating his life by means forbidden to the true Magi. Warren could not grasp all the mystic symbolism of the account, but he gathered that the Sultan had in some way been tricked out of life to further Abd Dhulma's dark purpose.

Warren was entirely skeptical with regard to Abd Dhulma's continued existence beyond the ordinary span of human life; to him, the crux of the old volume was contained in the reiterated statement that the Sultan had broken the sacred rule of the Magi *by writing down* those secrets hitherto communicated only by word of mouth from generation to generation of priests. The Sultan had caused the secrets to be buried with him in his Tomb, and it was this Tomb that Warren had sought through fifteen years of unceasing toil and danger.

He had found the Tomb. He had found the precious records. But he was blind—the treasure was as lost to him as though it still lay in the darkness of the Tomb.

THE vibrating golden voice cut short his recollections: "You would choose a short life with sight and opportunity to continue your work, rather than the ordinary span of your days as a blind and helpless man?"

Warren laughed harshly: "Why discuss it? I have no choice."

"So! Yet there is a bargain I would offer you. I will give you your sight again, and a year more of work. In return you will pay me the balance of your life. That is to say, at the end of twelve months you will put your life in my hands unreservedly—body and soul."

Again that strange awareness of timeless primitive forces assailed Warren, but he resisted strongly.

"Let me understand this bargain more precisely," he began, in stiff deliberate fashion. "You mean you will restore my sight completely, and I can work for another year. After that, I must die. Do you want me to promise to commit suicide, or do you mean to kill me yourself?"

"I will take your life at the end of the allotted time. It will be painless and swift and easy. I will set free your soul in such a manner that I can use the living flame as my own. Your soul for a year more of life and work!"

"It's the most fantastic thing I ever heard." Warren's forehead above his blank unfocussed eyes was wrinkled in doubt and perplexity. "Who are you to talk about men's lives and souls as if you were a god?"

"I am Saiehh the Wanderer, a man like yourself, *sidi.*" But the voice belied the words it spoke.

A long silence fell between the two, pregnant for the blind man with dim incalculable issues which his mind was not able to formulate.

A year of reprieve before the final dark! In one year he could translate the secrets he had discovered, and leave a monument of success that would make his name pass down the centuries with those of the great ones of the earth.

What did this bargain entail more than he had always contemplated as the finish to his life? Death of the body was the end of him as a separate entity. A legacy of work accomplished was all of him he had ever believed could endure after his heart had ceased to beat. His ego would be extinguished like a candle-flame once the breath left his body.

If he did not make this bargain—always supposing his visitor could fulfill his promise—what was there before him but gray frustrated years and a final drifting out into the unknown with nothing to justify his long seeking, nothing to leave behind but the record of a great defeat? If he agreed to the bargain, if he bought one more year of life in its fullest sense, did it matter what happened after that? What could happen to him once he was dead? Did it concern him what this mystic babbled of his soul?

"You do well to ponder, *sidi.* Yet, I would remind you that the time for your choice is here, and now. This gift I have brought is like the fabulous lilies that grew by the Well of Zool and bloomed for ever in the keeping of that man who plucked them at their birth, but withered to decay if left ungathered."

Warren's thoughts flickered over the past, present, and future as a castaway might look desperately across a wide sea. Some obscure sentiment held him back. Deep in his consciousness he was aware of an unsuspected survival of faith in things greater and more enduring than human thought.

What did he dread in agreeing to the bargain? The sudden shock of blindness, the weeks of alternating hope and despair that followed—these, he told him-

self, must temporarily have undermined his lifelong convictions. He would buy the year of life, and let this Eastern mystic make the best of a bad bargain.

"I agree!" He spoke with sudden emphasis. "Give me my sight, give me a year in which to complete my work, and after that I am yours, body—and soul, since you insist on my possession of one."

Something which felt to Warren like a metal seal was pressed against the palm of his left hand, and his fingers involuntarily closed about the small hard object.

"Now you will repeat the words I say, the words of the oath which seals our bargain."

Syllable by syllable Warren echoed the voice in a long unaccented phrase which held only the vaguest meaning for him. He imagined he caught sounds resembling the names of certain dark divinities worshipped in the dawn of time; and again there was a recurring word which suggested the invocation to the Element of Fire used by Zoroastrians. But the inflexion of the slurred liquid voice made it impossible for him to judge accurately.

While he repeated the last long-drawn syllables, he felt a sharp stab of pain in his left hand, as if the little hard object he held had suddenly turned to a prisoned flame, and for a moment his whole body glowed as if plunged into a river of fire. This passed in a flash, and he felt the healer's touch upon his eyes in a slow rhythmic movement that was irresistible. Veil after veil of perfumed darkness swept down upon him. He sank—drifting downward—deep into the womb of time. . . .

THE long quiet night hours wore on, while Warren lay in a profound and healing sleep. His visitor remained beside the couch, and any one who entered the silent courtyard retired in awed and instant obedience to the watcher's gesture and commanding look.

The sun rose, turning the lovely pattern of color in the glass roof above the sleeper to fresh clear hues of some faery orchard, with its glowing fruit, delicate blossom, and palest leaf patterned against the sky. Warren's face was dappled with flecks of blue and rose and green as he lay breathing like a child, the recent lines of pain smoothed out, the grim endurance of his lips relaxed to plastic curves of youth.

He stirred and opened his eyes, then flung himself from the divan with a loud astonished cry:

"I can see! I can see!"

He stood still, unbelieving, and stared at the soft harmony of color overhead as a man might stare at the gates of Paradise.

"I can see!" he repeated in a hushed whisper, looking intently at his own hands, the details of his dress, then letting his glance flash around the pillared courtyard.

Suddenly his bright swift look encountered another pair of eyes, and his gaze remained fixed and frowning as he and the healer stood face to face for a long silent minute. Warren's body tingled from head to foot as if he had received an electric shock.

"I have fulfilled my promise," said the healer finally. "You have the gift of sight."

Warren did not reply. His eyes grew cold and stern as he looked at the tall figure in the wine-red burnoose. Repulsion and anger overmastered him so completely that his tongue grew dry and stiff between his set teeth, and he could only look in silence at the narrow face of his companion, with its long slanted black eyes, high cheek-bones, aquiline nose, and the crimson, woman's mouth above the sweeping strength of the jaw.

Such mingled power, subtlety, intellect, and unspeakable vice Warren had never seen in any human countenance, though his long wanderings had brought him in contact with tribes degraded almost beyond imagination. But here was something that, in contrast, made those savage degenerates seem merely unpleasant, unfortunate animals. Here was more than human nature at its lowest dregs. The nerves at the back of Warren's neck stiffened as if iron fingers gripped him; this being in man's image was dark, inhuman, not natural flesh and blood.

Under the hood of the burnoose, oblique narrowed eyes gleamed wrathfully in shadow; Warren met their gaze, refusing to turn aside or let slip his inner resistance to their power. A silent duel was fought in that minute, will against will. The issue was not decisive, for they were disturbed by a sudden cry, and turned to see the wizened figure of an old man standing under one of the arches.

"WARAN! Waran!" The intruder crossed the wide courtyard in joyful haste. "My prayers for thee are answered! Allah hath removed the veil of darkness from thine eyes! *As shukr l'illah,* thou dost surely see once more!" With extravagant unbounded emotion Ibn Sa'ud took Warren's hand and touched it to his lips and forehead. *"Al hamdu l'illah!* Said I not that thine affliction would pass? Ah, how I rejoice with thee!"

Ibn Sa'ud, the wealthy old jewel merchant, had been friend and almost father to Warren since the two met in Tunis some twelve years ago. He turned with a courteous apology for his interruption toward the tall figure in red, but the words died on his lips.

"Thou . . . thou!" Ibn Sa'ud stammered, horror blotting out the benevolent joy on his wrinkled face. *"Ya gomâny,* it is thou, accursed one! By the life of my beard, I have long sought thee, and now——"

Snatching a two-edged knife from his girdle, Ibn Sa'ud leaped, stabbing viciously at the breast of the tall healer. Warren made an instinctive, hasty movement to stop the merchant, but the healer remained calm and immovable as a statue of bronze. Ibn Sa'ud, as his knife touched the red burnoose, was sent spinning across the room like paper in a high wind, while the knife clanked on the marble floor, its sharp blade a lump of molten metal. A wave of heat, sudden and fierce as the dreaded *gibli* that preludes a sandstorm, beat up against Warren's face, and it seemed as if the healer's burnoose were on fire, so intense and blinding was its color in that moment.

"Fool!" The healer's voice was full of contempt. "There is no knife so keen that it will not turn aside from my heart. As well fight the desert wind as pit such toys against my strength. Touch me once more, and thou wilt lie as shapeless and twisted as thy useless weapon there."

Warren dashed across the courtyard to lift Ibn Sa'ud to his feet, but the Arab drew away and tottered forward to face his enemy.

"Billah, I fear thee not! I shall die when Allah wills. What is written, is written! Thou, whose thrice-accursed bones should have crumbled to dust a thousand years ago, I fear thee not! What stolen soul is prisoned in thine evil body now? Whose life burns within thee, thou devil's spawn?"

"Toothless old chatterer!" replied the healer, his eyes mere gleaming slits of light. "Without doubt thy wits are grown feeble as the legs that tremble under thee. I am Saiehh, the World Wanderer; all men know me by that name."

"By Allah and by Allah, no other

treads this earth unto thee, thou fuel for hell's burning! Thou hast another name, and dress, and speech today, but think you another man ever wore a mask like thine—with its soft red woman's mouth, and eyes like the gray wolf when he hunts? I know who and what thou art! My father learned too late to save himself. But this man shall not add another span to thy cursed existence. He shall know this very hour."

The healer waved a slender, supple hand toward Warren.

"There, most wise and venerable prophet, stands the answer to thy words." He turned with a profound salaam to Warren. "In twelve moons' time I return for my payment. May thy work prosper, *sidi*. Be ready to receive me in this room when the last hour of the twelfth moon is come. That is my hour, and you can not escape it, or me. Nor may you leave Kufra now. I advise you not to attempt it, for my servants are strong and sudden, and you will oppose them to your own hurt."

As the red burnoose vanished in the shadow of a deep archway, Ibn Sa'ud plucked Warren's sleeve.

"Is it so? Did *he* give back thy sight?" gasped the little Arab as Warren urged him gently toward a pile of rugs and cushions. "Tell me, my son, didst take thy sight from his evil hands?"

"He healed me, yes."

"*Aie! Aie!* How art thou forsaken of Allah! And the price—the price he asked?"

IBN SA'UD'S pitiable agitation had the effect of steadying Warren. He felt strong and sane once more; the fears and doubts that the healer's strange personality had imposed upon him passed like a cloud from his mental horizon. He felt assured that in less than twelve months Saiehh would turn up to claim a more substantial reward than he had asked.

No use denying the fellow must possess unusual powers and unusual knowledge to have cured him when so many others had failed. But old races preserved old secrets, as Warren well knew. Modern science was notably defeated now and then by the wisdom of the ancients. His own case was merely another illustration of the fact. Saiehh was an Eastern physician, the mystic touch was part of his stock in trade. A soul! What was a mythical soul compared with two sound invaluable eyes? Oriental jargon and tosh about paying in souls!

"Thou hast no answer, yet I know the price," wailed Ibn Sa'ud. "I know the only price he ever asks—that son of darkness! It was thy soul, thy living soul!"

"Well, yes, that's exactly what he asked," assented Warren, taken aback, "though how on earth you should guess——" He pulled himself up short, on guard against making any more mystery about the healer and his peculiar bargain. "I suppose the man is well known here in Kufra, one of the sacred mad marabouts the people revere just because they are mad."

"No! He is not one of us, not one of our Holy Men whom Allah hath afflicted. He is not a man, as we are men, my son—I swear to that by the seven sacred streams of Paradise. Ah, how art thou lost and betrayed. *Aie! Aie! Aie!*"

The old merchant rocked in misery, wraith-like, shrunken and forlorn, his long white beard brushing his lap. Warren looked at him with pity, but at the same time Ibn Sa'ud's exaggerated laments made him feel more obstinately convinced that the whole affair of the healer and his bargain was fantastic to absurdity.

No doubt this Saiehh was a magician

of sorts, skilled in hypnotism and many time-worn tricks by which he imposed his will upon others. Warren recalled, with a pang of shame, that he had not come through the test very creditably himself.

"Thine ears are closed against my words," reproached Ibn Sa'ud. "Yet must I speak, although every word is poison on my tongue. Tell me, in all the books of old, which thy wisdom hath mastered, hast ever read of one, Abd Dhulma?"

"Abd Dhulma!" echoed Warren. "Yes, but where have you come across that name? How have you found the books in which that name occurs?"

"Not in books have I met him, but in flesh and blood."

Warren stared in speechless surprize and interest. Could the ancient, semi-legendary character of Abd Dhulma really have been perpetuated to this day? All his scholarly interests were aroused. He settled back, drew out his pipe with a momentary pang of joy at this minor pleasure now fully restored to him, and prepared to listen.

"Go on, Ibn Sa'ud," he begged. "Tell me everything you know about Abd Dhulma."

"By the life of my neck, I will tell thee all! He came to my father who was sick of a wound received in a desert foray with the Veiled Ones. My father lay dying before his tent, while I, a boy of ten, watched beside him. I listened for the tread of the Black Camel, death, with a breaking heart. In that hour came a healer, even this one who restored to thee thine eyesight. He promised my father life, and he exacted a price which I was too young to understand. I did not heed their talk, I did not care, save that my father should live."

"Yes," urged Warren gently.

"He lived five years to teach me many things of wisdom. Then came a moon's uprising when he knew for certain who and what was the healer. I found him stricken, looking at a strange fiery mark upon his hand—the seal of Abd Dhulma, Lord of Fire." Ibn Sa'ud's voice sank to the rustle of dried grasses. "My father told me all concerning his bargain and the price that he would be made to pay."

Warren listened with intense interest. This was an extraordinary survival of old beliefs, and, since his own recent encounter with one of these healers, he could readily understand the baneful influence a type of that sort might exert over his patients. Probably they really did die at certain times ordered by the healers, the power of magnetism and suggestion being almost unlimited under favorable conditions.

"That price was paid," went on the whispering, halting voice at last. "I found my father one day at dawn . . . his eyes were open . . . staring . . . full of horror!"

Warren did not interrupt by the slightest movement, afraid of disturbing the old man's memories.

"And thus that accursed one renews his years, by stealing the soul out of a man's body as one would take a jewel from a pouch."

"Extraordinary!" murmured Warren, under his breath.

"And now thou also must pay to keep life in Abd Dhulma. Thy soul is forfeit to him!"

"You believe, then, that Saiehh and Abd Dhulma are one and the same man? But that's utterly impossible! It's sixty years since you saw the healer you call Abd Dhulma, and the man who cured me is young—thirty, or thirty-five at the most."

"Even so, and is not that the proof of my words? It is Abd Dhulma who bargained with thee, Abd Dhulma the Walk-

er-through-the-centuries! He will steal thy soul even as he plucked my father's from him. *Aie! Aie!"*

"No, no!" urged Warren. "It is a strong likeness that has deceived you. The healer that was here is no doubt of the same blood and kin as the man who dealt with your father; but I can not believe he is the same man."

Ibn Sa'ud rose and gazed mournfully at the speaker.

"I have no more words with which to convince thee of the truth," he said with dignity. "Yet, at the rising of the twelfth moon, that same sign will burn redly on thy hand which told my father his hour was almost come."

DISMISSING Ibn Sa'ud's forebodings as the result of his age, and inborn superstition, Warren plunged into his work, absorbed to the exclusion of all else.

The faded brittle parchments yielded up their secrets one by one. He had never felt more inspired, and he blessed the hour that had brought Saiehh to him. His eyesight was stronger and keener than he ever remembered it; often he would forget to use his magnifying glasses for an hour at a time, and would be amazed to find himself deciphering scripts and maps that had formerly tried his eyes even with artificial aid.

Then he reached a chapter in the Sultan Izzad ben Kari's record that brought back, with a quite peculiar chill of discomfort, the memory of his bargain and of Ibn Sa'ud's warnings.

The first part of the manuscripts had dealt exclusively with the profound wisdom of the true Magi, a wisdom which the Sultan had tried to preserve for himself in writing when he discovered that slowly and insidiously the false Magus, Abd Dhulma, was deflecting the course of his ambitions. Evidently the Sultan had been a true seeker after knowledge in the beginning, and had followed the stern rule and discipline of the Magi faithfully.

Later, misled by Abd Dhulma, the Sultan relinquished dreams of freedom and happiness for his people, and sought more personal ambitions. He used his magic powers for unworthy ends, causing rare flowers and fruits to bloom in midwinter, producing wines and luxuries at his feasts beyond the most epicurean imaginings, painting a still lovelier bloom on the beauties of his *harim.* From a wise and noble ruler of a great kingdom, the Sultan sank to the level of a mere necromancer, while Abd Dhulma tempted him further and further into the morass of folly.

At last the Sultan Izzad ben Kari was stricken with leprosy, and all his magic was powerless to make him clean again. Abd Dhulma took advantage of his extremity and offered him the first of those grim bargains by which the Lord of Fire was henceforth to perpetuate his own existence: a further span of life, free of disease, if he would yield up his soul into Abd Dhulma's evil hands.

"Nor might I pass through the gates of my city from the hour that bargain was struck," read Warren in the Sultan's records. *"Abd Dhulma, Lord of Fire, set his barriers against me, so that I might in no way escape the terror of mine end. All my life is spent. All my magic power is spilled like water in the desert. I pass from my kingdom unlamented and accursed."*

Warren read on all through that day and the night that followed, without pausing for food or rest, and dawn found him still at his desk, with desperately weary body and desperately uneasy mind. He recalled the last mocking words of

the healer: "Nor may you leave Kufra now." Was that true? he wondered.

He had not attempted to leave Kufra, so absorbing had been his work, so great his anxiety to guard his precious eyesight by not exposing it again to the glare of the desert sands. He took his sun-helmet, and a pair of dark glasses, and left the house, determined to put the healer's threat to proof at once.

He went to the Bab-es-Shergui, the Gate of the East. His pulses quickened as he approached it; involuntarily he straightened his shoulders and dug his finger-nails into the palms of his hands. By the opened gateway only a sleepy watchman stood, whose greeting ended in a noisy yawn.

As Warren reached the violet shadow cast by the walls across the threshold of the Bab-es-Shergui, he was arrested by a sensation of violent heat, and drew back as from the open mouth of a furnace. The record of the Sultan's despairing attempts to escape from Bokhara, and from his master, Abd Dhulma, seemed to dance before Warren's dazzled eyes.

Eight centuries ago the royal victim had written down those words, and today Warren himself tasted the same agony of helplessness and awe that the Sultan had known. Again and again he strove to pass the unseen barrier, only to draw back with scorched clothing and blistered hands. The watchman looked in mild astonishment at this fresh proof of the madness of the Nazrani, and concluded that to fight the air was but another of the many foolish customs of these dogs of Unbelievers.

Warren goaded himself to try gate after gate, and at each one the same fiery obstacle stretched between him and the freedom of the wide desert beyond. At last one more chance only remained to him, the narrow gate by which camels were driven into the caravansary. He entered the *fonduk,* passed between the groups of men sitting round their cooking-pots, and came within ten feet or so of the narrow gateway. He took a deep breath, and dashed for it with the energy of despair.

Next moment the natives in the *fonduk* were startled by a loud cry of intolerable agony, and those nearest the gateway saw Warren drop like a stone. He was carried back insensible to his house, and lay there still and silent for many hours. A smell of burning was strong upon him, and his face and hands were scorched and blistered as if he had walked through fire.

At last he returned to consciousness. For days he sat staring in front of him, old and stricken, unable to work, to do anything save to sit silently staring. . . . Stunned, unbelieving, his whole nature rose in revolt against the convictions that were forcing themselves upon him.

AT LAST he turned back to his work again like one possessed. Haggard and thin, he slaved on at the Sultan's records, bitterly grudging every hour his tired body demanded for food and rest. Ibn Sa'ud was the only visitor admitted to his study, and to him alone Warren disclosed the results of his researches. The old man grew, if possible, more frail and wraith-like than before, and would sit for hours in the mosque of Kufra, his lips muttering prayers and verses from the Holy Books, his eyes dim with the slow difficult tears of age.

In Warren's mind, thoughts of the bargain he had made and of the price he must pay grew to an overwhelming ever-present horror. His soul! What did that mean to him, and to Abd Dhulma? What was it that this Master of Magic intended to claim of him in a few short months? A new respect, a new fear of this thing

that was his soul, deepened in Warren's consciousness.

Did the bargain mean that his inner self, his thoughts, his memory, his will, were to be transferred to the healer? Would they become one with the vice, and intellect, and forbidden wisdom that mingled in the dark soul of Abd Dhulma?

Warren shivered in spite of the suffocating heat, and bent with haunted eyes over the ancient manuscripts, striving with growing fear and anxiety to find some word of hope in the black despair of the Sultan's confessions, some suggestion that a loophole existed by which the bargain might be cancelled.

Two-thirds of the yellow parchments were translated now, and each page brought closer and closer the menace of Abd Dhulma's return, until he seemed ever at Warren's side. He was conscious day and night of that narrow face, with its scarlet mocking lips, and long half-shut eyes, whose glance drew a man's soul from his body and sent it whirling into space.

". . . so mighty now, to what power may this false Magus attain throughout the centuries to come?" Warren read on feverishly. *"TO KNOW ALL. TO DARE ALL. TO WILL ALL. TO KEEP SILENT. These four rules of the true Magi he has kept, and the ancient magic lies like a star within his hands. Yet hath he also drawn about him the fires of black, forbidden magic. . . . And now the time approaches when I must be one with Abd Dhulma, living his life, sharing his thoughts, bound for ever to such evil as never man conceived."*

"Living his life, sharing his thoughts——" Warren repeated the words in a whisper, his eyes sick and miserable. "No, no!" he protested, as if the writer of that lament had been standing there at his side. "No—not that—not that!"

ONE night when only three months were left of the year that Abd Dhulma had allotted, Warren greeted the jewel merchant with a new expression in his eyes. Ibn Sa'ud marked it at once.

"Thou hast made some new discovery?" The Arab's hopeless face brightened. "My son, my son, what hast thou found? Tell me, hath Allah made clear a way of escape for thee?"

"It is a doubtful and dangerous way, if so," returned Warren slowly. "Yet the pages of the manuscript are clear on one point at least. The Sultan left in his Tomb a weapon of destruction which he had neither opportunity nor courage to use. It is all very vague, and the language is so cryptic and cautious that I scarcely know whether there is any real hope or not. This much the Sultan states in plainest terms—he feared to employ that weapon more than he feared to die. It belonged to the Magi, and was used in their sacrificial rites. Also, it brings fearful punishment upon any one who wields it without sufficient strength and daring."

Warren put up a hand to restrain Ibn Sa'ud's joyful emotion. "A sentence follows which I can not decipher—no doubt a warning to the man who uses the weapon, or instructions as to its properties. I have already spent three days and nights trying to discover the meaning of those few words. They must be of vital importance. But I can not understand them—I can not!"

"Allah!" breathed the little merchant. "Do not give thyself to despair, my Waran. Hast thou not read of the dagger? When the time comes, Allah will guide thine arm. What need of more?

Tell me all concerning this blessed weapon."

"It is concealed in the Tomb. See this——" Warren indicated a roughly outlined sketch in the broad margin of a parchment he held. "The Sultan has used an ancient Chaldean symbol signifying a sword, or knife, or any weapon with a keen cutting edge. The floor of the inner chamber of the Tomb is of polished red sandstone marked out with many magic signs. Under the symbol, repeated here in this sketch, lies the only instrument in the world that can end Abd Dhulma's abnormal existence."

"And thou wilt return to the Tomb to find that weapon?" Ibn Sa'ud's face was transfigured.

"Impossible!" Warren's features grew pinched and haggard. "I find I can not leave Kufra."

"Not leave Kufra! Why thus, my son? If it is money for thy men, and camels, my gold is at all times thine own. And there are many great ones who would provide all thy needs and count themselves happy. What strange thought possesses thee? Indeed thou must leave Kufra, and at once. How wilt thou return in time with the weapon unless thou dost make all speed?"

"Ibn Sa'ud, I can not pass the gates of Kufra," repeated Warren, his voice cold and quiet with the effort he made to be calm. "Every one of the four gates I have tried, even the narrow gate to the *fonduk*. I am prevented from leaving the city," he finished meaningly, his eyes full on Ibn Sa'ud.

"Thou art prevented!" repeated the merchant, dropping his voice. "*Aie*, by the fires of hell I take thy meaning at last! Abd Dhulma hath closed the gates to thee?"

Warren nodded, his face turned aside from the lamplight, his lean nervous fingers tapping the papers which covered the great table before him.

"I can not describe it very well," he went on. "A wall of flame seemed to cut me off from every gate. I tried to force my way through and fell senseless. It was like being struck by lightning. The Magi guarded their temples in this way, and an intruder was struck down on the threshold if he tried to enter a sacred place. I think that Abd Dhulma was probably standing by me at each entrance, and used his strange control of electricity to keep me back. I did not see him, of course, but to make himself invisible is a child's trick to one so versed in occult arts as Abd Dhulma."

Ibn Sa'ud sat pulling at his long beard, his forehead wrinkled in thoughtful perplexity. At last he looked up with something approaching a smile. "I will make this journey to the Tomb. I will bring back the weapon to thy hand. Thou hast but to give me directions. I will go within three days; as soon as guides are found, and camels brought from pasture and watered, and provisions packed for the journey, then will I go!"

Warren shook his head; words were impossible in answer to such proof of his old friend's devotion. It was unthinkable, of course, that Ibn Sa'ud should face such a terrible ordeal of endurance. The journey to the Tomb was one from which the bravest young tribesman might shrink; for this frail old merchant it would be certain death.

"It makes no difference whether thou sayest yea or nay." Ibn Sa'ud touched Warren's clenched hands understandingly. "Think you it would be easier to see thee taken from me, as my father was taken long years ago? I shall not die on this journey, for Allah hath surely discovered to us this secret that we may destroy Abd Dhulma. I shall return in

safety again to Kufra, *billah!* Do not let us spend strength in foolish words or argument, as do the women of the *harim.* Tell me rather, my son, what needs there for me to do?"

THREE days later, Ibn Sa'ud on a priceless white *mehari,* that aristocrat among camels, rode out of the south gate of Kufra. A picked band of desert-men accompanied him on the trail, and two guides were those who had been with Warren himself on his own expedition to the Tomb; all were seasoned fighters and steeled to the utmost endurance.

Warren stood on the walls of the city to watch the *garfla* depart, the camels strung out in a thin dark line across the desert, moving like a snake among the sand valleys toward the limitless horizon. It cut him to the heart to see Ibn Sa'ud ride out on this perilous journey; and he watched him vanish with small hope of ever seeing him, or any of that valiant little company, again.

Weeks passed. Months melted, and were swallowed up within the hot white walls of Kufra, and Warren worked unceasingly as the thin crescent moons of those last months rose over the lovely oasis-city, grew to red orbs that hung vast and portentous on the rim of the wilderness, then faded, shrank, and vanished.

Sick with restless misery he paced the broad white walls in the hour of the twelfth moon's rising. He looked stedfastly to the south, watching for a cloud of dust on the horizon which might herald Ibn Sa'ud's return. At intervals his gaze flickered irresistibly to a belt of palm-trees, above which the silver rim of the new moon would soon be visible.

His hands clenched in unbearable suspense as dusk deepened to complete darkness. It was coming—coming—every second brought it nearer to him. In a moment he should know! The final, damning proof of the healer's power would come now, or——

A glint of light above the palm-trees. Warren held his breath. The moon's tip showed bright and sharp. He sank onto a stone bench, catching his left hand convulsively with his right. The crescent moon rose higher. Warren crouched down, murmuring with white lips:

"No! No! It can not be that!"

The burning, throbbing pain in his left hand increased to agony, as the sky grew bright with stars, and the new moon hung airily in space. At last, with an abrupt desperate movement, he thrust out his hand and looked at it. On its palm a blood-red fiery symbol burned, seal of Abd Dhulma, Lord of Fire. Warren stared at it with death in his heart. Line for line, curve for curve, it was the mark that Izzad ben Kari had both drawn and described in his records—a winged serpent writhing on the arrow that pierced its body. It seemed alive on Warren's shrinking flesh; he felt its poisoned fangs bite to the very bone.

His eyes sought the horizon again. Would the caravan return in time? Would he be granted one last chance to reckon with his inhuman enemy?

His work was done, the year's work for which he had paid so overwhelming a price. And yet it would not have been too great a price perhaps if he might have left behind him that unparalleled record of the Ancient World. But he knew now that he must destroy both the Sultan's manuscripts and his own translations of them. Those long-buried secrets were a legacy too dangerous for the world of today. The old and terrible wisdom must be rediscovered slowly, century by century, as nations gradually learned such stern discipline as had made the vast

power of the Magi possible. His work, the labor of his years, must be sacrificed.

That night, he ordered a great brass bowl to be brought and set down on the delicately patterned mosaic of the paved courtyard. In this bowl he heaped the brittle old manuscripts and with them his own fresh, carefully inscribed pages. Then, taking an unlighted lamp from a wall-niche, he poured oil upon the heaped-up papers in the bowl.

For long minutes he stood looking down at the manuscripts he was about to destroy. If only he had closed that little book he found at Harvard fifteen years ago! He had had his chance like other men. He had chosen the wrong road. Now he must pass out of life—and to what?

His whole body shook violently, and he was obliged to sit down until the fit of nausea and trembling passed. At last, nerving himself afresh, he set alight the mass of papers. As the flames licked up greedily Warren felt the heat in every nerve of his body. The precious parchments crackled and collapsed, settling deeper and deeper in the bowl.

From time to time he stirred the blackened mass so that the flames sprang up afresh, and unburned sheets of yellow parchment and white foolscap caught fire, and curled and writhed and fell to ashes with the rest.

It was done. His lifework was a handful of black dust. All that remained to him now was the price that must be paid.

"To give my life that Abd Dhulma may live on!" he groaned, his somber gaze on the contents of the brass bowl.

THE days dragged past in a march of slow intolerable hours, and Warren went to and fro, to and fro upon the city walls, watching for a cloud of dust in the south, waiting for Ibn Sa'ud to bring back the only thing on earth that might save him. The long days and hot sleepless nights seemed interminable, yet they flashed past with a cruel speed that Warren would have given worlds to arrest.

The last dawn came. Warren watched the sun roll back the mists from the empty desert with a terror that shook him almost to madness. The next day's sun would shine on this body of his—a robbed and worthless sepulcher. And he, himself, the living thought and brain that was Warren Glenn, would be living still. His personality would be behind those oblique, inhuman eyes that mirrored Abd Dhulma's monstrous ego; his decent human experiences and precious memories caught up into the devilish intelligence of his enemy.

When the sun went down, Warren left the walls, while a pageant of gold and red and purple gave him farewell of the world. He imagined it might, perhaps, be easier to wait through the last terrible hours under his own roof. The peaceful desert was too cruel a contrast with the dark tumult of his mind, its emptiness mocked his longing eyes.

He sat in the courtyard, and watched the unrelenting hours pass. The brass bowl which held the cold dead ashes of his lifework stood close by. He wanted to see that to the end. Those ashes were all that were left of the treasure he had sought, and found, and finally lost for ever.

Once more his mind struggled with the Sultan's cryptic references to the weapon Ibn Sa'ud had gone to find. The phrases, conned so often and carefully before he burned the manuscripts, beat over and over in his memory:

"Between the weapon and him who wields it, Abd Dhulma will drop the blinding veils of many illusions . . . strong indeed must be that one who can

endure his magic . . . a cunning wrist, an arm as strong as steel are naught . . . Abd Dhulma veils the senses, putting to shame the clearness of the eye, the straightness of the aim . . . to fight This One is to fight the wind, and cloud, and changeful sea . . . YET THE MAN WHO HOLDS THIS WEAPON IS MASTER OF THE HOUR."

That fatally untranslated sentence had followed. The line of strange undecipherable words stood out blackly ominous in Warren's memory. "Probably the key to the situation!" he reflected bitterly. "But what matter now? It's too late. My time is up. I have no weapon—no chance of using one if I had it. Ibn Sa'ud must be lying dead somewhere in that cursed desert. Yes, he is dead . . . and in a few minutes I shall be——"

The courtyard darkened. Warren looked up and saw a shadow pass between the arches. He rose to meet Abd Dhulma, who came forward, his tall red-clad figure vivid and dangerous as a pillar of fire.

WARREN faced him, his mind racing back over all he had learned since last he looked into the healer's eyes, those fathomless wells, where points of light flickered like marsh-fires over a black morass.

Abd Dhulma lifted a dark slender hand, motioning him to approach. Warren felt the solid floor sway beneath his feet, and a thousand compelling impulses urged him forward to that waiting figure. He felt his breath coming deep and slow and rhythmic in response to Abd Dhulma's compulsion, and moving abruptly he fought to break through the web of illusion which was closing in about him.

Abd Dhulma gestured again, the slightest, most imperceptible of movements; yet Warren's body, traitor to his will, stepped stiffly forward in obedience to the command. His thoughts broke up into a thousand swimming stars. He had the sensation of diving into incalculable space, of falling—turning as he fell—swinging in vast giddy circles in an immense void. . . .

The motion ceased with a jolt that brought a sharp cry to his lips. He found himself standing firmly on the tessellated pavement. At that moment he saw Ibn Sa'ud fling himself across the courtyard, a dagger in his thin, shaking hand.

"Allah! I am in time! In his heart, Waran, in his heart!"

One glance Warren gave to the travel-stained emaciated figure, as he grasped the weapon and turned swiftly to face his enemy, his heart lifting in wild new hope, his limbs strong, his brain cool and steady once more.

Abd Dhulma's crimson mouth mocked no longer; its line was grim and unsmiling; his eyes, narrowed to gleaming slits of hate, were fixed on the short broad blade in Warren's hand; all the youth and beauty of his dark face was transformed to venomous fear.

Warren rushed upon him, the dagger poised to strike. He thrust with all his strength, but the dagger seemed to shrink to a child's toy in his hand, and missed Abd Dhulma by many inches, causing Warren to stagger almost to his knees. As he recovered himself, he saw the other's long eyes fixed intently on him, and, for a brief second, he felt the room, with its pillared balcony, swing dizzily about him. He thrust again, but now the blade seemed to bend and coil about his knees and body like a long rope, pinioning him helplessly, while Abd Dhulma stood aside and watched him from under heavy lids.

Warren clutched the strange weapon more tightly, aiming again and again at that tall figure, but the blade turned ice-

cold in his hands, and his numbed fingers were helpless and stiffened to the bone. The Sultan's warning flashed into his mind: *"To fight This One is to fight the wind, the cloud, the changeful sea."*

He gathered himself together for a fresh attack, determined to shake off the spell of illusions. The face of Abd Dhulma grew dark and terrible; his red burnoose swayed with his swift movements like a fiery cloud, bewildering and dazzling Warren as he sought to plunge the dagger home.

Now . . . now! Warren sprang to take advantage of Abd Dhulma's unguarded moment, but the dagger seemed heavy as lead; it dragged down his arm, wrenching his back and shoulders with a sudden cruel pull; he fell back sick and helpless. For a moment he despaired.

Abd Dhulma's flaming eyes met his in triumph. Goaded beyond fear and weakness by the challenge, Warren sprang forward and struck repeatedly, putting all his failing strength into the blows. He crashed to the floor, for the weapon became light as a flower in his fingers, and the red burnoose brushed past him like a living flame.

Painfully, Warren got to his knees, struggled to his feet once more, his strength running from him like a tide set seaward; but his will clung fast to his purpose even as his fingers clung to the weapon he wielded to his own hurt.

From a great distance he heard Ibn Sa'ud's thin reedy voice calling: "Fight! The hour is almost run! Fight, my Waran!"

Desperately, Warren lunged forward to where the red burnoose flamed before his aching eyes; while Abd Dhulma's face set in hideous effort as he strove to break down his opponent's obstinate resistance.

FROM somewhere in the perfumed dark of the courtyard came the soft deep chime of a clock. Twelve notes rang out . . . echoing . . . solemn. . . .

Warren held fast to his weapon. It had failed him, but he held it in a grip of steel. Instinct, stronger than reason or despair, warned him not to loosen his grip for a second, useless though the dagger seemed.

Abd Dhulma circled bafflingly about him, moving with the dancing flicker of a tall red flame. As Warren stood, breathless and dizzy in the center of the courtyard, Ibn Sa'ud ran eagerly forward, calling out: "The hour is struck. Thou hast won, my Waran!" But, as Abd Dhulma menaced him with swirl of blood-red draperies, the old man stepped back, and Warren heard him mutter: "Now, surely, all is lost! The hour is struck and Abd Dhulma yet lives! Alas, that Waran knows not the Magic of the Blade!"

That sentence—that lost sentence in the manuscript. Warren knew he was fighting as one blindfold. What knowledge those untranslated words might have given him! Ibn Sa'ud spoke truly—he did not know the Magic of the Blade!

Abd Dhulma stood, back up against a massive pillar. It struck Warren that his enemy was leaning heavily against it for support; and, with the thought, he leaped forward to catch Abd Dhulma off guard. So nearly did he achieve it that his dagger slit the red burnoose from breast to hem.

With a snarl, more beast-like than human, Abd Dhulma drew aside. Scorched and blistered, Warren fell at his enemy's feet. Once more the awful agony that had met him at the gates of Kufra struck him down. Shivering and helpless with pain, he waited, his eyes on the tall figure of the Magus.

Abd Dhulma waited also. And now it

was certain that he was glad of a moment's respite. Warren stared—uncertain—afraid to trust the evidence of his senses.

A loud sudden exclamation from Ibn Sa'ud confirmed his own belief. "Ha! He grows old! By Allah and the Prophets, he fails—he grows old! See, he shrivels like a dead leaf! He grows old, *billah,* he grows old at last!"

It was true. Abd Dhulma's dark skin was drawn and puckered around mouth and eyes. The strong column of his throat sagged. The erect muscular body was bowed and shortened.

Warren got to his feet, and stared incredulously. And as he stood dazed and uncertain, Abd Dhulma was upon him. No longer gracefully defensive, the Magus now attacked. Savage and dangerous as a cornered beast he fell upon Warren.

And if Warren had tasted all the pains of hell before, he felt he had not known what torture was until this moment. Abd Dhulma's burnoose flicked about him in lightning strokes, and each light touch seemed to burn him to the bone.

Round and round the two whirled, Warren turning on his own axis to meet the raging, baffling, fiery-red figure of Abd Dhulma. Above the prayers and exhortations of the frantic little merchant, Warren could hear his own voice shouting defiance at his enemy. Beside himself with pain, he spun on his heel, cursing, slashing the air, sweeping his dagger to and fro as if he were mowing grass with a scythe.

Suddenly the tormenting flickering burnoose was stilled. Its billowing folds collapsed and fell about the Magus. Warren stood with feet wide apart to balance himself, his arms hanging heavily, trembling from head to foot. He blinked . . . stared . . . blinked again.

Was *that* Abd Dhulma before him? Was that worn decrepit creature the dread healer? Warren looked incredulously at the old, old man—a haggard skeleton swaying weakly across the courtyard—incredibly ancient, wrinkled, ugly, and tremulous.

Warren's astonishment betrayed him. Surprize loosened the tension of his nerves and muscles. His hands relaxed, his grip on the dagger loosened. In another second the precious weapon would have fallen to the ground.

In time, he saw Abd Dhulma's eyes. They were fixed on the dagger, watching it hopefully as it slipped . . . slipped . . .

In a great flash of illumination, Warren divined the Magic of the Blade! The words of the Sultan had been literally true. *THE MAN WHO HOLDS THIS WEAPON. . . .* The whole secret was to *hold* it fast. While it was in his hand Abd Dhulma might threaten and torment, but he could not utterly destroy him.

Another truth dawned almost instantaneously in Warren's quickened brain. If he could hold out long enough with the weapon in his hand, he could starve Abd Dhulma out of his borrowed existence. On the stroke of midnight the Magus should have renewed his term of years—stolen the flame of a living soul to revitalize his age-old body!

As if in answer to the thought, Abd Dhulma's red lips twisted evilly, his long eyes narrowing to slits of malice. He moved forward, his tall figure held stiffly, his feet heavier in their tread.

"You have learned my secret," the healer's voice echoed deep and hollow under the pillared arches, "and you think to match yourself against my centuries of wisdom! Fool! For this you shall suffer greatly when at last you pay your debt to me."

Warren braced himself, and wasted not strength in words. Abd Dhulma thrust his face within a few inches of Warren's own, and the slanting eyes sent their cruel chill to his very brain.

With a cry he recoiled, a horror of darkness enveloping him. He knew his reason could endure no more. A fury of bestial madness crept through his veins . . . rising swiftly . . . overwhelming him. He heard his own voice like the howl of a dog. The impulse to run on all fours . . . to crouch . . . to spring upon his enemy grew to fury.

Who was this enemy? What heavy weight dragged at his right hand . . . holding him back . . . keeping him upright on his feet? . . .

It was a dagger! No, a serpent that twisted in his grip, its wicked head drawn back to strike! He raised his arm to fling off the creature, when Ibn Sa'ud's thin reedy cry recalled him partly to his senses.

"Waran! Waran! Waran!"

Whose was that voice? What name did it call? Warren heard his own snarl of impatient fury at the check, and the shocking sound restored his sanity.

Abd Dhulma's gaze was fiercely concentrated on him, his lips muttering rapid words. Warren found himself shaking his right hand violently, and realized that no snake's head, but the handle of the dagger, was between his fingers.

The dagger! He must not drop the dagger! Mad or sane, he must keep that in his hand. His strength was almost spent. He knew it well—knew his exhausted brain and body could endure no fresh assaults.

But Abd Dhulma was failing too. The evil flickering fires behind his eyes were growing dim, the long oblique eyes themselves were sunk in cavernous sockets. The crimson woman's mouth was colorless, its full curves pinched and sucked inward. The high cheek-bones protruded yellow and shining above hollow cheeks. The proud aquiline nose showed fleshless as a mummy's.

HEAVILY Warren tried to calculate his chances. How long? How long would it take for the centuries to roll back on his enemy, to put the burden of their years upon the man who had cheated them?

His mind refused the problem. His strength was done. He could fight no more. The Sultan's word's danced like will-o'-the-wisps across his memory . . . *the man who holds the weapon.* . . .

Once more the swimming burning darkness . . . full of whispers . . . full of half-seen faces . . . eyes that stared . . . blazing lidless eyes coming closer and closer. . . . He was surrounded by the Things . . . closer they moved in on him . . . eyes full of hate . . . green slanting eyes. . . .

But he had wings! He could fly up from the circling horror of those eyes! Why did he stand so stupidly grasping a heavy stone in his right hand? It was the weight of the stone that prevented his escape. The fiery eyes were drawing in . . . closer. . . .

"No! Keep off! Keep off!" His hoarse cry of terror drowned the rattle of the stone as he opened his fingers to let it drop to the ground.

The eyes vanished. His own voice was echoing in the courtyard and Abd Dhulma faced him in senile triumph.

Warren heard Ibn Sa'ud's long sorrowful wail. He looked down to see the dagger at his feet. He stooped to pick it up, but its weight was unbelievable. He could not lift the weapon an inch from the tessellated pavement. The Magic of the Blade was lost to him!

He raised his eyes to meet Abd Dhul-

ma's. One brown claw of a hand grasping a carven seat for support, the other hand fumbling at his belt, his enemy stood leering and cackling at his despair.

Dully Warren watched him lift trembling skinny arms above his head, heard the cracked wheezy remnant of the healer's voice. Unable to resist, he found himself moving on slow heavy feet toward his enemy. The fight was ended. Abd Dhulma had won.

Inch by inch, Warren dragged himself across the courtyard. In another minute that obscene and ancient horror in the wine-red burnoose would be transformed —would stand in proud strong youth once more! And he, himself, would be part of that youth. His own soul would live—remembering—behind those rheumy eyes that drew him nearer . . . nearer still. . . .

Now his eyes were on a level with the blinking, drooping eyes of Abd Dhulma. Only a few inches separated his face from the other's twitching features.

The Magus put a pellet in Warren's passive fingers. Warren received it like an obedient child, the glinting fire in the other's eyes drugged him utterly. Cold, ice-green, those eyes still held him fast.

Stiffly he raised the pellet to his lips. This would at last deliver him to Abd Dhulma, Lord of Fire. Poison! to cut loose the soul from out his body.

Abd Dhulma's lids drooped—lifted with effort—drooped again over the fierce old eyes. Warren stood arrested—awaiting orders. Abd Dhulma's eyes opened widely. Horror was in them . . . they looked through Warren to some unimaginable sight.

With the pellet in it, Warren's hand dropped to his side. A cold weight seemed lifting from his head and heart.

Abd Dhulma swayed, caught at the great carved chair . . . his cold fingers slipping . . . clutching. . . . A gurgling moan died in his throat. He strove to speak, to fix his gaze on Warren. Too late. By a few seconds the Magus had been outstripped by Time at last. He fell—his body crumbled, disintegrated, turned to dust. The wine-red burnoose lay, a flat and empty pall, upon the marble floor.

Ibn Sa'ud ran to Warren's assistance, easing him to a pile of cushions, bringing wine and cordials. At length he took up Warren's left hand, peering at it anxiously.

"The Mark is gone!" he cried. "By Allah and by Allah, thou art free! The Walker-through-the-centuries will walk no more!"

Old Garfield's Heart

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A strange occult story of a heart that continued to beat vigorously after its owner was dead

I WAS sitting on the porch when my grandfather hobbled out and sank down on his favorite chair with the cushioned seat, and began to stuff tobacco in his old corncob-pipe.

"I thought you'd be goin' to the dance," he said.

"I'm waiting for Doc Blaine," I answered. "I'm going over to old man Garfield's with him."

My grandfather sucked at his pipe awhile before he spoke again.

"Old Jim purty bad off?"

"Doc says he hasn't a chance."

"Who's takin' care of him?"

"Joe Braxton — against Garfield's wishes. But somebody had to stay with him."

My grandfather sucked his pipe noisily, and watched the heat lightning playing away off up in the hills; then he said: "You think old Jim's the biggest liar in this county, don't you?"

"He tells some pretty tall tales," I admitted. "Some of the things he claimed he took part in, must have happened before he was born."

"I came from Tennessee to Texas in 1870," my grandfather said abruptly. "I saw this town of Lost Knob grow up from nothin'. There wasn't even a log-hut store here when I came. But old Jim Garfield was here, livin' in the same place he lives now, only then it was a log cabin. He don't look a day older now than he did the first time I saw him."

"You never mentioned that before," I said in some surprize.

"I knew you'd put it down to an old man's maunderin's," he answered. "Old Jim was the first white man to settle in this country. He built his cabin a good fifty miles west of the frontier. God knows how he done it, for these hills swarmed with Comanches then.

"I remember the first time I ever saw him. Even then everybody called him 'old Jim.'

"I remember him tellin' me the same tales he's told you—how he was at the battle of San Jacinto when he was a youngster, and how he'd rode with Ewen Cameron and Jack Hayes. Only I believed him, and you don't."

"That was so long ago——" I protested.

"The last Indian raid through this country was in 1874," said my grandfather, engrossed in his own reminiscences. "I was in on that fight, and so was old Jim. I saw him knock old Yellow Tail off his mustang at seven hundred yards with a buffalo rifle.

"But before that I was with him in a fight up near the head of Locust Creek. A band of Comanches came down Mesquital, lootin' and burnin', rode through the hills and started back up Locust Creek, and a scout of us were hot on their heels. We ran on to them just at sundown in a mesquite flat. We killed seven of them, and the rest skinned out through the brush on foot. But three of our boys were killed, and Jim Garfield got a thrust in the breast with a lance.

"It was an awful wound. He lay like a dead man, and it seemed sure nobody could live after a wound like that. But an old Indian came out of the brush, and when we aimed our guns at him, he made the peace sign and spoke to us in Spanish. I don't know why the boys didn't shoot him in his tracks, because our blood was heated with the fightin' and killin', but somethin' about him made us hold our fire. He said he wasn't a Comanche, but was an old friend of Garfield's, and wanted to help him. He asked us to carry Jim into a clump of mesquite, and leave him alone with him, and to this day I don't know why we did, but we did. It was an awful time—the wounded moanin' and callin' for water, the starin' corpses strewn about the camp, night comin' on, and no way of knowin' that the Indians wouldn't return when dark fell.

"We made camp right there, because the horses were fagged out, and we watched all night, but the Comanches didn't come back. I don't know what went on out in the mesquite where Jim

Garfield's body lay, because I never saw that strange Indian again; but durin' the night I kept hearin' a weird moanin' that wasn't made by the dyin' men, and an owl hooted from midnight till dawn.

"And at sunrise Jim Garfield came walkin' out of the mesquite, pale and haggard, but alive, and already the wound in his breast had closed and begun to heal. And since then he's never mentioned that wound, nor that fight, nor the strange Indian who came and went so mysteriously. And he hasn't aged a bit; he looks now just like he did then—a man of about fifty."

In the silence that followed, a car began to purr down the road, and twin shafts of light cut through the dusk.

"That's Doc Blaine," I said. "When I come back I'll tell you how Garfield is."

Doc Blaine was prompt with his predictions as we drove the three miles of post-oak covered hills that lay between Lost Knob and the Garfield farm.

"I'll be surprized to find him alive," he said, "smashed up like he is. A man his age ought to have more sense than to try to break a young horse."

"He doesn't look so old," I remarked.

"I'll be fifty, my next birthday," answered Doc Blaine. "I've known him all my life, and he must have been at least fifty the first time I ever saw him. His looks are deceiving."

OLD Garfield's dwelling-place was reminiscent of the past. The boards of the low squat house had never known paint. Orchard fence and corrals were built of rails.

Old Jim lay on his rude bed, tended crudely but efficiently by the man Doc Blaine had hired over the old man's protests. As I looked at him, I was impressed anew by his evident vitality. His frame was stooped but unwithered, his limbs rounded out with springy muscles. In his corded neck and in his face, drawn though it was with suffering, was apparent an innate virility. His eyes, though partly glazed with pain, burned with the same unquenchable element.

"He's been ravin'," said Joe Braxton stolidly.

"First white man in this country," muttered old Jim, becoming intelligible. "Hills no white man ever set foot in before. Gettin' too old. Have to settle down. Can't move on like I used to. Settle down here. Good country before it filled up with cow-men and squatters. Wish Ewen Cameron could see this country. The Mexicans shot him. Damn 'em!"

Doc Blaine shook his head. "He's all smashed up inside. He won't live till daylight."

Garfield unexpectedly lifted his head and looked at us with clear eyes.

"Wrong, Doc," he wheezed, his breath whistling with pain. "I'll live. What's broken bones and twisted guts? Nothin'! It's the heart that counts. Long as the heart keeps pumpin', a man can't die. My heart's sound. Listen to it! Feel of it!"

He groped painfully for Doc Blaine's wrist, dragged his hand to his bosom and held it there, staring up into the doctor's face with avid intensity.

"Regular dynamo, ain't it?" he gasped. "Stronger'n a gasoline engine!"

Blaine beckoned me. "Lay your hand here," he said, placing my hand on the old man's bare breast. "He does have a remarkable heart action."

I noted, in the light of the coal-oil lamp, a great livid scar in the gaunt arching breast—such a scar as might be made by a flint-headed spear. I laid my hand directly on this scar, and an exclamation escaped my lips.

Under my hand old Jim Garfield's heart pulsed, but its throb was like no other heart action I have ever observed. Its power was astounding; his ribs vibrated to its steady throb. It felt more like the vibrating of a dynamo than the action of a human organ. I could feel its amazing vitality radiating from his breast, stealing up into my hand and up my arm, until my own heart seemed to speed up in response.

"I can't die," old Jim gasped. "Not so long as my heart's in my breast. Only a bullet through the brain can kill me. And even then I wouldn't be rightly dead, as long as my heart beats in my breast. Yet it ain't rightly mine, either. It belongs to Ghost Man, the Lipan chief. It was the heart of a god the Lipans worshipped before the Comanches drove 'em out of their native hills.

"I knew Ghost Man down on the Rio Grande, when I was with Ewen Cameron. I saved his life from the Mexicans once. He tied the string of ghost wampum between him and me — the wampum no man but me and him can see or feel. He came when he knowed I needed him, in that fight up on the headwaters of Locust Creek, when I got this scar.

"I was dead as a man can be. My heart was sliced in two, like the heart of a butchered beef steer.

"All night Ghost Man did magic, callin' my ghost back from spirit-land. I remember that flight, a little. It was dark, and gray-like, and I drifted through gray mists and heard the dead wailin' past me in the mist. But Ghost Man brought me back.

"He took out what was left of my mortal heart, and put the heart of the god in my bosom. But it's his, and when I'm through with it, he'll come for it. It's kept me alive and strong for the lifetime of a man. Age can't touch me. What do I care if these fools around here call me an old liar? What I know, I know. But hark'ee!"

His fingers became claws, clamping fiercely on Doc Blaine's wrist. His old eyes, old yet strangely young, burned fierce as those of an eagle under his bushy brows.

"If by some mischance I *should* die, now or later, promise me this! Cut into my bosom and take out the heart Ghost Man lent me so long ago! It's his. And as long as it beats in my body, my spirit'll be tied to that body, though my head be crushed like an egg underfoot! A livin' thing in a rottin' body! Promise!"

"All right, I promise," replied Doc Blaine, to humor him, and old Jim Garfield sank back with a whistling sigh of relief.

HE DID not die that night, nor the next, nor the next. I well remember the next day, because it was that day that I had the fight with Jack Kirby.

People will take a good deal from a bully, rather than to spill blood. Because nobody had gone to the trouble of killing him, Kirby thought the whole countryside was afraid of him.

He had bought a steer from my father, and when my father went to collect for it, Kirby told him that he had paid the money to me—which was a lie. I went looking for Kirby, and came upon him in a bootleg joint, boasting of his toughness, and telling the crowd that he was going to beat me up and make me say that he had paid me the money, and that I had stuck it into my own pocket. When I heard him say that, I saw red, and ran in on him with a stockman's knife, and cut him across the face, and in the neck, side, breast and belly, and the only thing that saved his life was the fact that the crowd pulled me off.

There was a preliminary hearing, and I was indicted on a charge of assault, and my trial was set for the following term of court. Kirby was as tough-fibered as a post-oak country bully ought to be, and he recovered, swearing vengeance, for he was vain of his looks, though God knows why, and I had permanently impaired them.

And while Jack Kirby was recovering, old man Garfield recovered too, to the amazement of everybody, especially Doc Blaine.

I well remember the night Doc Blaine took me again out to old Jim Garfield's farm. I was in Shifty Corlan's joint, trying to drink enough of the slop he called beer to get a kick out of it, when Doc Blaine came in and persuaded me to go with him.

As we drove along the winding old road in Doc's car, I asked: "Why are you insistent that I go with you this particular night? This isn't a professional call, is it?"

"No," he said. "You couldn't kill old Jim with a post-oak maul. He's completely recovered from injuries that ought to have killed an ox. To tell you the truth, Jack Kirby is in Lost Knob, swearing he'll shoot you on sight."

"Well, for God's sake!" I exclaimed angrily. "Now everybody'll think I left town because I was afraid of him. Turn around and take me back, damn it!"

"Be reasonable," said Doc. "Everybody knows you're not afraid of Kirby. Nobody's afraid of him now. His bluff's broken, and that's why he's so wild against you. But you can't afford to have any more trouble with him now, and your trial only a short time off."

I laughed and said: "Well, if he's looking for me hard enough, he can find me as easily at old Garfield's as in town, because Shifty Corlan heard you say where we were going. And Shifty's hated me ever since I skinned him in that horse-swap last fall. He'll tell Kirby where I went."

"I never thought of that," said Doc Blaine, worried.

"Hell, forget it," I advised. "Kirby hasn't got guts enough to do anything but blow."

But I was mistaken. Puncture a bully's vanity and you touch his one vital spot.

OLD JIM had not gone to bed when we got there. He was sitting in the room opening on to his sagging porch, the room which was at once living-room and bedroom, smoking his old cob pipe and trying to read a newspaper by the light of his coal-oil lamp. All the windows and doors were wide open for the coolness, and the insects which swarmed in and fluttered around the lamp didn't seem to bother him.

We sat down and discussed the weather —which isn't so inane as one might suppose, in a country where men's livelihood depends on sun and rain, and is at the mercy of wind and drouth. The talk drifted into other kindred channels, and after some time, Doc Blaine bluntly spoke of something that hung in his mind.

"Jim," he said, "that night I thought you were dying, you babbled a lot of stuff about your heart, and an Indian who lent you his. How much of that was delirium?"

"None, Doc," said Garfield, pulling at his pipe. "It was gospel truth. Ghost Man, the Lipan priest of the Gods of Night, replaced my dead, torn heart with one from somethin' he worshipped. I ain't sure myself just what that somethin' is—somethin' from away back and a long way off, he said. But bein' a god, it can do without its heart for awhile. But when I die—if I ever get my head

smashed so my consciousness is destroyed —the heart must be given back to Ghost Man."

"You mean you were in earnest about cutting out your heart?" demanded Doc Blaine.

"It has to be," answered old Garfield. "A livin' thing in a dead thing is opposed to nat'er. That's what Ghost Man said."

"Who the devil *was* Ghost Man?"

"I told you. A witch-doctor of the Lipans, who dwelt in this country before the Comanches came down from the Staked Plains and drove 'em south across the Rio Grande. I was a friend to 'em. I reckon Ghost Man is the only one left alive."

"Alive? Now?"

"I dunno," confessed old Jim. "I dunno whether he's alive or dead. I dunno whether he was alive when he came to me after the fight on Locust Creek, or even if he was alive when I knowed him in the southern country. Alive as we understand life, I mean."

"What balderdash is this?" demanded Doc Blaine uneasily, and I felt a slight stirring in my hair. Outside was stillness, and the stars, and the black shadows of the post-oak woods. The lamp cast old Garfield's shadow grotesquely on the wall, so that it did not at all resemble that of a human, and his words were strange as words heard in a nightmare.

"I knowed you wouldn't understand," said old Jim. "I don't understand myself, and I ain't got the words to explain them things I feel and know without understandin'. The Lipans were kin to the Apaches, and the Apaches learnt curious things from the Pueblos. Ghost Man *was*—that's all I can say—alive or dead, I don't know, but he *was*. What's more, he *is*."

"Is it you or me that's crazy?" asked Doc Blaine.

"Well," said old Jim, "I'll tell you this much—Ghost Man knew Coronado."

"Crazy as a loon!" murmured Doc Blaine. Then he lifted his head. "What's that?"

"Horse turning in from the road," I said. "Sounds like it stopped."

I STEPPED to the door, like a fool, and stood etched in the light behind me. I got a glimpse of a shadowy bulk I knew to be a man on a horse; then Doc Blaine yelled: "Look out!" and threw himself against me, knocking us both sprawling. At the same instant I heard the smashing report of a rifle, and old Garfield grunted and fell heavily.

"Jack Kirby!" screamed Doc Blaine. "He's killed Jim!"

I scrambled up, hearing the clatter of retreating hoofs, snatched old Jim's shotgun from the wall, rushed recklessly out on to the sagging porch and let go both barrels at the fleeing shape, dim in the starlight. The charge was too light to kill at that range, but the bird-shot stung the horse and maddened him. He swerved, crashed headlong through a rail fence and charged across the orchard, and a peach tree limb knocked his rider out of the saddle. He never moved after he hit the ground. I ran out there and looked down at him. It was Jack Kirby, right enough, and his neck was broken like a rotten branch.

I let him lie, and ran back to the house. Doc Blaine had stretched old Garfield out on a bench he'd dragged in from the porch, and Doc's face was whiter than I'd ever seen it. Old Jim was a ghastly sight; he had been shot with an old-fashioned .45-70, and at that range the heavy ball had literally torn off the top of his head. His features were masked with blood and brains. He had been directly behind me, poor old devil, and

he had stopped the slug meant for me.

Doc Blaine was trembling, though he was anything but a stranger to such sights.

"Would you pronounce him dead?" he asked.

"That's for you to say," I answered. "But even a fool could tell that he's dead."

"He *is* dead," said Doc Blaine in a strained unnatural voice. "Rigor mortis is already setting in. But feel his heart!"

I did, and cried out. The flesh was already cold and clammy; but beneath it that mysterious heart still hammered steadily away, like a dynamo in a deserted house. No blood coursed through those veins; yet the heart pounded, pounded, pounded, like the pulse of Eternity.

"A living thing in a dead thing," whispered Doc Blaine, cold sweat on his face. "This is opposed to nature. I am going to keep the promise I made him. I'll assume full responsibility. This is too monstrous to ignore."

Our implements were a butcher-knife and a hack-saw. Outside only the still stars looked down on the black post-oak shadows and the dead man that lay in the orchard. Inside, the oil lamp flickered, making strange shadows move and shiver and cringe in the corners, and glistened on the blood on the floor, and the red-dabbled figure on the bench. The only sound inside was the crunch of the saw-edge in bone; outside an owl began to hoot weirdly.

Doc Blaine thrust a red-stained hand into the aperture he had made, and drew out a red, pulsing object that caught the lamplight. With a choked cry he recoiled, and the thing slipped from his fingers and fell on the table. And I too cried out involuntarily. For it did not fall with a soft meaty thud, as a piece of flesh should fall. It *thumped* hard on the table.

IMPELLED by an irresistible urge, I bent and gingerly picked up old Garfield's heart. The feel of it was brittle, unyielding, like steel or stone, but smoother than either. In size and shape it was the duplicate of a human heart, but it was slick and smooth, and its crimson surface reflected the lamplight like a jewel more lambent than any ruby; and in my hand it still throbbed mightily, sending vibratory radiations of energy up my arm until my own heart seemed swelling and bursting in response. It was cosmic *power*, beyond my comprehension, concentrated into the likeness of a human heart.

The thought came to me that here was a dynamo of life, the nearest approach to immortality that is possible for the destructible human body, the materialization of a cosmic secret more wonderful than the fabulous fountain sought for by Ponce de Leon. My soul was drawn into that unterrestrial gleam, and I suddenly wished passionately that it hammered and thundered in my own bosom in place of my paltry heart of tissue and muscle.

Doc Blaine ejaculated incoherently. I wheeled.

The noise of his coming had been no greater than the whispering of a night wind through the corn. There in the doorway he stood, tall, dark, inscrutable —an Indian warrior, in the paint, war bonnet, breech-clout and moccasins of an elder age. His dark eyes burned like fires gleaming deep under fathomless black lakes. Silently he extended his hand, and I dropped Jim Garfield's heart into it. Then without a word he turned and stalked into the night. But when Doc Blaine and I rushed out into the yard an instant later, there was no sign of any human being. He had vanished like a phantom of the night, and only something that looked like an owl was flying, dwindling from sight, into the rising moon.

"There was terror sprouting in the dark of his soul."

Monkeys

By E. F. BENSON

A strange, fantastic tale of a great English surgeon and the curse that attended the rifling of an Egyptian tomb

DOCTOR HUGH MORRIS, while still in the early thirties of his age, had justly earned for himself the reputation of being one of the most dexterous and daring surgeons in his profession, and both in his private practise and in his voluntary work at one of the great London hospitals his record of success as an operator was unparalleled among his colleagues. He believed that vivisection was the most fruitful means of progress in the science of surgery, holding, rightly or wrongly, that he was justified in causing suffering to animals, though sparing them all possible pain, if thereby he could reasonably hope to gain fresh knowledge about similar operations on human beings which would save life or mitigate suffering; the motive was good, and the gain already immense. But he had nothing but scorn for those who, for their own amusement, took out packs of hounds to run foxes to death, or matched two greyhounds to see which would give the death-grip to a single terrified hare: that, to him, was wanton tor-

ture, utterly unjustifiable. Year in, year out, he took no holiday at all, and for the most part he occupied his leisure when the day's work was over in study.

He and his friend Jack Madden were dining together one warm October night at his house looking on to Regent's Park. The windows of his drawing-room on the ground-floor were open, and they sat smoking, when dinner was done, on the broad window-seat. Madden was starting next day for Egypt, where he was engaged in archeological work, and he had been vainly trying to persuade Morris to join him for a month up the Nile, where he would be engaged throughout the winter in the excavation of a newly discovered cemetery across the river from Luxor, near Medinet Habu. But it was no good.

"When my eye begins to fail and my fingers to falter," said Morris, "it will be time for me to think of taking my ease. What do I want with a holiday? I should be pining to get back to my work all the time. I like work better than loafing. Purely selfish."

"Well, be unselfish for once," said Madden. "Besides, your work would benefit. It can't be good for a man never to relax. Surely freshness is worth something."

"Precious little if you're as strong as I am. I believe in continual concentration if one wants to make progress. One may be tired, but why not? I'm not tired when I'm actually engaged on a dangerous operation, which is what matters. And time's so short. Twenty years from now I shall be past my best, and I'll have my holiday then, and when my holiday is over, I shall fold my hands and go to sleep for ever and ever. Thank God, I've got no fear that there's an after-life. The spark of vitality that has animated us burns low and then goes out like a wind-blown candle, and as for my body, what do I care what happens to that when I have done with it? Nothing will survive of me except some small contribution I may have made to surgery, and in a few years' time that will be superseded. But for that I perish utterly."

Madden squirted some soda into his glass.

"Well, if you've quite settled that——" he began.

"I haven't settled it, science has," said Morris. "The body is transmuted into other forms, worms batten on it, it helps to feed the grass, and some animal consumes the grass. But as for the survival of the individual spirit of a man, show me one tittle of scientific evidence to support it. Besides, if it did survive, all the evil and malice in it must surely survive too. Why should the death of the body purge that away? It's a nightmare to contemplate such a thing, and oddly enough, unhinged people like spiritualists want to persuade us for our consolation that the nightmare is true. But older still are those old Egyptians of yours, who thought that there was something sacred about their bodies, after they were quit of them. And didn't you tell me that they covered their coffins with curses on any one who disturbed their bones?"

"Constantly," said Madden. "It's the general rule, in fact. Marrowy curses written in hieroglyphics on the mummy-case or carved on the sarcophagus."

"But that's not going to deter you this winter from opening as many tombs as you can find, and rifling from them any objects of interest or value."

Madden laughed.

"Certainly it isn't," he said. "I take out of the tombs all objects of art, and I unwind the mummies to find and annex their scarabs and jewelry. But I make an absolute rule always to bury the bodies again. I don't say that I believe in the

power of those curses, but anyhow a mummy in a museum is an indecent object."

"But if you found some mummied body with an interesting malformation wouldn't you send it to some anatomical institute?" asked Morris.

"It has never happened to me yet," said Madden, "but I'm pretty sure I shouldn't."

"Then you're a superstitious Goth and an anti-educational vandal," remarked Morris. . . . "Hullo, what's that?"

He leant out of the window as he spoke. The light from the room vividly illuminated the square of lawn outside, and across it was crawling the small twitching shape of some animal. Hugh Morris vaulted out of the window, and presently returned, carrying carefully in spread hands a little gray monkey, evidently desperately injured. Its hind-legs were stiff and outstretched as if it was partially paralyzed.

Morris ran his soft deft fingers over it.

"What's the matter with the little beggar, I wonder," he said. "Paralysis of the lower limbs: it looks like some lesion of the spine."

The monkey lay quite still, looking at him with anguished appealing eyes as he continued his manipulation.

"Yes, I thought so," he said. "Fracture of one of the lumbar vertebræ. What luck for me! It's a rare injury, but I've often wondered. . . . And perhaps luck for the monkey too, though that's not very probable. If he was a man and a patient of mine, I shouldn't dare to take the risk. But, as it is——"

JACK MADDEN started on his southward journey next day, and by the middle of November was at work on this newly discovered cemetery. He and another Englishman were in charge of the excavation, under the control of the Antiquity Department of the Egyptian Government. In order to be close to their work and to avoid the daily ferrying across the Nile from Luxor, they hired a bare roomy native house in the adjoining village of Gurnah. A reef of low sandstone cliff ran northward from here toward the temple and terraces of Deir-el-Bahari, and it was in the face of this and on the level below it that the ancient graveyard lay. There was much accumulation of sand to be cleared away before the actual exploration of the tombs could begin, but trenches cut below the foot of the sandstone ridge showed that there was an extensive area to investigate.

The more important sepulchers, they found, were hewn in the face of this small cliff: many of these had been rifled in ancient days, for the slabs forming the entrance into them had been split, and the mummies unwound, but now and then Madden unearthed some tomb that had escaped these marauders, and in one he found the sarcophagus of a priest of the nineteenth dynasty, and that alone repaid weeks of fruitless work. There were nearly a hundred *ushaptiu* figures of the finest blue glaze; there were four alabaster vessels in which had been placed the viscera of the dead man removed before the embalming; there was a table of which the top was inlaid with squares of variously colored glass, and the legs were of carved ivory and ebony; there were the priest's sandals adorned with exquisite silver filigree; there was his staff of office inlaid with a diaper-pattern of cornelian and gold, and on the head of it, forming the handle, was the figure of a squatting cat, carved in amethyst, and the mummy, when unwound, was found to be decked with a necklace of gold plaques and onyx beads. All these were sent down to the Gizeh museum at Cairo, and Madden re-

interred the mummy at the foot of the cliff below the tomb. He wrote to Hugh Morris describing this find, and laying stress on the unbroken splendor of these crystalline winter days, when from morning to night the sun cruised across the blue, and on the cool nights when the stars rose and set on the vaporless rim of the desert. If by chance Hugh should change his mind, there was ample room for him in this house at Gurnah, and he would be very welcome.

A FORTNIGHT later Madden received a telegram from his friend. It stated that he had been unwell and was starting at once by long sea to Port Said, and would come straight up to Luxor. In due course he announced his arrival at Cairo and Madden went across the river next day to meet him; it was reassuring to find him as vital and active as ever, the picture of bronzed health. The two were alone that night, for Madden's colleague had gone for a week's trip up the river, and they sat out, when dinner was done, in the enclosed courtyard adjoining the house. Till then Morris had shied off the subject of himself and his health.

"Now I may as well tell you what's been amiss with me," he said, "for I know I look a fearful fraud as an invalid, and physically I've never been better in my life. Every organ has been functioning perfectly except one, but something suddenly went wrong there just once. It was like this."

He paused a moment.

"After you left," he said, "I went on as usual for another month or so, very busy, very serene, and, I may say, very successful. Then one morning I arrived at the hospital when there was one perfectly ordinary but major operation waiting for me. The patient, a man, was wheeled into the theater anesthetized, and I was just about to make the first incision into the abdomen, when I saw that there was sitting on his chest a little gray monkey. It was not looking at me, but at the fold of skin which I held between my thumb and finger. I knew, of course, that there was no monkey there, and that what I saw was a hallucination, and I think you'll agree that there was nothing much wrong with my nerves when I tell you that I went through the operation with clear eyes and an unshaking hand. I had to go on: there was no choice about the matter. I couldn't say 'Please take that monkey away,' for I knew there was no monkey there. Nor could I say, 'Somebody else must do this, as I have a distressing hallucination that there is a monkey sitting on the patient's chest.' There would have been an end of me as a surgeon and no mistake. All the time I was at work it sat there, absorbed for the most part in what I was doing and peering into the wound, but now and then it looked up at me, and chattered with rage. Once it fingered a spring-forceps which clipped a severed vein, and that was the worst moment of all. . . . At the end it was carried out still balancing itself on the man's chest. . . . I think I'll have a drink. Strongish, please: thanks.

"A beastly experience," he said when he had drunk. "Then I went straight away from the hospital to consult my old friend Robert Angus, the alienist and nerve-specialist, and told him exactly what had happened to me. He made several tests, he examined my eyes, tried my reflexes, took my blood-pressure: there was nothing wrong with any of them. Then he asked me questions about my general health and manner of life, and among these questions was one which I am sure has already occurred to you, namely, had anything occurred to me

lately, or even remotely, which was likely to make me visualize a monkey. I told him that a few weeks ago a monkey with a broken lumbar vertebra had crawled on to my lawn, and that I had attempted an operation—binding the broken vertebra with wire—which had occurred to me before as a possibility. You remember the night, no doubt?"

"Perfectly," said Madden. "I started for Egypt next day. What happened to the monkey, by the way?"

"It lived for two days: I was pleased, because I had expected it would die under the anesthetic, or immediately afterward from shock. To get back to what I was telling you. When Angus had asked all his questions, he gave me a good wigging. He said that I had persistently overtaxed my brain for years, without giving it any rest or change of occupation, and that if I wanted to be of any further use in the world, I must drop my work at once for a couple of months. He told me that my brain was tired out and that I had persisted in stimulating it. A man like me, he said, was no better than a confirmed drunkard, and that, as a warning, I had had a touch of a sort of delirium tremens. The cure was to drop work, just as a drunkard must drop drink. He laid it on hot and strong: he said I was on the verge of a breakdown entirely owing to my own foolishness but that I had wonderful physical health, and that if I did break down I should be a disgrace. Above all—and this seemed to me awfully sound advice—he told me not to attempt to avoid thinking about what had happened to me. If I kept my mind off it, I should be perhaps driving it into the subconscious, and then there might be bad trouble. 'Rub it in: think what a fool you've been,' he said. 'Face it, dwell on it, make yourself thoroughly ashamed of yourself.' Monkeys, too: I wasn't to avoid the thought of monkeys. In fact, he recommended me to go straight away to the Zoölogical Gardens, and spend an hour in the monkey-house."

"Odd treatment," interrupted Madden.

"Brilliant treatment. My brain, he explained, had rebelled against its slavery, and had hoisted a red flag with the device of a monkey on it. I must show it that I wasn't frightened at its bogus monkeys. I must retort on it by making myself look at dozens of real ones which could bite and maul you savagely, instead of one little sham monkey that had no existence at all. At the same time I must take the red flag seriously, recognize there was danger, and rest. And he promised me that sham monkeys wouldn't trouble me again. Are there any real ones in Egypt, by the way?"

"Not so far as I know," said Madden. "But there must have been once, for there are many images of them in tombs and temples."

"That's good. We'll keep their memory green and my brain cool. Well, there's my story. What do you think of it?"

"Terrifying," said Madden. "But you must have got nerves of iron to get through that operation with the monkey watching."

"A hellish hour. Out of some disordered slime in my brain there had crawled this unbidden thing, which showed itself, apparently substantial, to my eyes. It didn't come from outside: my eyes hadn't told my brain that there was a monkey sitting on the man's chest, but my brain had told my eyes so, making fools of them. I felt as if some one whom I absolutely trusted had played me false. Then again I have wondered whether some instinct in my subconscious mind revolted against vivisection. My reason says that it is justified, for it

teaches us how pain can be relieved and death postponed for human beings. But what if my subconscious mind persuaded my brain to give me a good fright, and reproduce before my eyes the semblance of a monkey, just when I was putting into practise what I had learned from dealing out pain and death to animals?"

He got up suddenly.

"What about bed?" he said. "Five hours' sleep was enough for me when I was at work, but now I believe I could sleep the clock round every night."

YOUNG Wilson, Madden's colleague in the excavations, returned next day and the work went steadily on. One of them was on the spot to start it soon after sunrise, and either one or both of them were superintending it, with an interval of a couple of hours from noon till two, until sunset. When the mere work of clearing the face of the sandstone cliff was in progress and of carting away the silted soil, the presence of one of them sufficed; for there was nothing to do but to see that the workmen shovelled industriously, and passed regularly with their baskets of earth and sand on their shoulders to the dumping-grounds, which stretched away from the area to be excavated in lengthening peninsulas of trodden soil. But, as they advanced along the sandstone ridge, there would now and then appear a chiselled smoothness in the cliff and then both must be alert. There was great excitement to see if, when they exposed the hewn slab that formed the door into the tomb, it had escaped ancient marauders, and still stood in place and intact for the modern to explore. But now for many days they came upon no sepulcher that had not already been opened. The mummy, in these cases, had always been unwound in the search for necklaces and scarabs, and its scattered bones lay about. Madden was always at pains to re-inter these.

At first Hugh Morris was assiduous in watching the excavations, but as day after day went by without anything of interest turning up, his attendance grew less frequent: it was too much of a holiday to watch the day-long removal of sand from one place to another. He visited the Tomb of the Kings, he went across the river and saw the temples at Karnak, but his appetite for antiquities was small. On other days he rode in the desert, or spent the day with friends at one of the Luxor hotels. He came home from there one evening in rare good spirits, for he had played lawn tennis with a woman on whom he had operated for malignant tumor six months before and she had skipped about the court like a two-year-old. "God, how I want to be at work again!" he exclaimed. "I wonder whether I ought not to have stuck it out, and defied my brain to frighten me with bogies."

The weeks passed on, and now there were but two days left before his return to England, where he hoped to resume work at once; his tickets were taken and his berth booked. As he sat over breakfast that morning with Wilson, there came a workman from the excavation, with a note scribbled in hot haste by Madden, to say that they had just come upon a tomb which seemed to be unrifled, for the slab that closed it was in place and unbroken. To Wilson, the news was like the sight of a sail to a marooned mariner, and when a quarter of an hour later Morris followed him, he was just in time to see the slab prized away. There was no sarcophagus within, for the rock walls did duty for that, but there lay there, varnished and bright in hue as if painted yesterday, the mummy-case roughly following the outline of the human form. By it stood the alabaster vases containing

the entrails of the dead, and at each corner of the sepulcher there were carved out of the sandstone rock, forming, as it were, pillars to support the roof, thick-set images of squatting apes. The mummy-case was hoisted out into the trench below the tomb, and carried away by workmen, on a bier of boards, into the courtyard of the excavators' house at Gurnah, for the opening of it and the unwrapping of the dead.

They got to work that evening directly they had fed: the face painted on the lid was that of a girl or young woman, and presently deciphering the hieroglyphic inscription, Madden read out that within lay the body of A-pen-ara, daughter of the overseer of the cattle of Senmut.

"Then follow the usual formulas," he said. "Yes, yes . . . ah, you'll be interested in this, Hugh, for you asked me once about it. A-pen-ara curses any who desecrates or meddles with her bones, and should any one do so, the guardians of her sepulcher will see to him, and he shall die childless and in panic and agony; also the guardians of her sepulcher will tear the hair from his head and scoop his eyes from their sockets, and pluck the thumb from his right hand, as a man plucks the young blade of corn from its sheath."

Morris laughed.

"Very pretty attentions," he said. "And who are the guardians of this sweet young lady's sepulcher? Those four great apes carved at the corners?"

"No doubt. But we won't trouble them, for tomorrow I shall bury Miss A-pen-ara's bones again with all decency in the trench at the foot of her tomb. They'll be safer there, for if we put them back where we found them, there would be pieces of her hawked about by half the donkey-boys in Luxor in a few days. 'Buy a mummy hand, lady? . . Foot of a Gyppy queen, only ten piasters, gentleman!' . . . Now for the unwinding."

It was dark by now, and Wilson fetched out a paraffin lamp, which burned unwaveringly in the still air. The lid of the mummy-case was easily detached, and within was the slim, swaddled body. The embalming had not been very thoroughly done, for all the skin and flesh had perished from the head, leaving only bones of the skull stained brown with bitumen. Round it was a mop of hair, which with the ingress of the air subsided like a belated *soufflé*, and crumpled into dust. The cloth that swathed the body was as brittle, but round the neck, still just holding together, was a collar of curious and rare workmanship: little ivory figures of squatting apes alternated with silver beads. But again a touch broke the thread that strung them together, and each had to be picked out singly. A bracelet of scarabs and cornelian still clasped one of the fleshless wrists, and then they turned the body over in order to get at the members of the necklace which lay beneath the nape. The rotted mummy-cloth fell away altogether from the back, disclosing the shoulder-blades and the spine down as far as the pelvis. Here the embalming had been better done, for the bones still held together with remnants of muscle and cartilage.

Hugh Morris suddenly sprang to his feet.

"My God, look there!" he cried. "One of the lumbar vertebræ, there at the base of the spine, has been broken and clamped together with a metal band. To hell with your antiquities, let me come and examine something much more modern than any of us!"

He pushed Jack Madden aside, and peered at this marvel of surgery.

"Put the lamp closer," he said, as if directing some nurse at an operation.

"Yes: that vertebra has been broken right across and has been clamped together. No one had ever, as far as I know, attempted such an operation except myself, and I have only performed it on that little paralyzed monkey that crept into my garden one night. But some Egyptian surgeon, more than three thousand years ago, performed it on a woman. And look, look! She lived afterward, for the broken vertebra put out that bony efflorescence of healing which has encroached over the metal band. That's a slow process, and it must have taken place during her lifetime, for there is no such energy in a corpse. The woman lived long: probably she recovered completely. And my wretched little monkey only lived two days and was dying all the time."

Those questing hawk-visioned fingers of the surgeon perceived more finely than actual sight, and now he closed his eyes as the tip of them felt their way about the fracture in the broken vertebra and the clamping metal band.

"The band doesn't encircle the bone," he said, "and there are no studs attaching it. There must have been a spring in it, which, when it was clasped there, kept it tight. It has been clamped round the bone itself: the surgeon must have scraped the vertebra clean of flesh before he attached it. I would give two years of my life to have looked on, like a student, at that masterpiece of skill, and it was worth while giving up two months of my work only to have seen the result. And the injury itself is so rare, this breaking of a spinal vertebra. To be sure, the hangman does something of the sort, but there's no mending that! Good Lord, my holiday has not been a waste of time!"

Madden settled that it was not worth while to send the mummy-case to the museum at Gizeh, for it was of a very ordinary type, and when the examination was over they lifted the body back into it, for re-interment next day. It was now long after midnight and presently the house was dark.

HUGH MORRIS slept on the ground-floor in a room adjoining the yard where the mummy-case lay. He remained long awake marvelling at that astonishing piece of surgical skill performed, according to Madden, some thirty-five centuries ago. So occupied had his mind been with homage that not till now did he realize that the tangible proof and witness of the operation would tomorrow be buried again and lost to science. He must persuade Madden to let him detach at least three of the vertebræ, the mended one and those immediately above and below it, and take them back to England as demonstration of what could be done: he would lecture on his exhibit and present it to the Royal College of Surgeons for example and incitement. Other trained eyes besides his own must see what had been successfully achieved by some unknown operator in the nineteenth dynasty. . . . But supposing Madden refused? He always made a point of scrupulously re-burying these remains: it was a principle with him, and no doubt some superstitious-complex—the hardest of all to combat with because of its sheer unreasonableness—was involved. Briefly, it was impossible to risk the chance of his refusal.

HE GOT out of bed, listened for a moment by his door, and then softly went out into the yard. The moon had risen, for the brightness of the stars was paled, and though no direct ray shone into the walled enclosure, the dusk was dispersed by the toneless luminosity

of the sky, and he had no need of a lamp. He drew off the lid, and folded back the tattered cerements which Madden had replaced over the body. He had thought that those lower vertebræ of which he was determined to possess himself would be easily detached, so far perished were the muscle and cartilage which held them together, but they cohered as if they had been clamped, and it required the utmost force of his powerful fingers to snap the spine, and as he did so the severed bones cracked as with the noise of a pistol shot. But there was no sign that any one in the house had heard it; there came no sound of steps, nor lights in the windows. One more fracture was needed, and then the relic was his. Before he replaced the ragged cloths he looked again at the stained fleshless bones. Shadow dwelt in the empty eyesockets as if black sunken eyes still lay there, fixedly regarding him; the lipless mouth snarled and grimaced. Even as he looked, some change came over its aspect, and for one brief moment he fancied that there lay staring up at him the face of a great brown ape. But instantly that illusion vanished, and replacing the lid he went back to his room.

The mummy-case was re-interred next day, and two evenings after Morris left Luxor by the night-train for Cairo, to join a homeward-bound P. & O. at Port Said. There were some hours to spare before his ship sailed, and having deposited his luggage, including a locked leather dispatch-case, on board, he lunched at the Café Tewfik near the quay. There was a garden in front of it with palm-trees and trellises gayly clad in bougainvilleas: a low wooded rail separated it from the street, and Morris had a table close to this. As he ate he watched the polychromatic pageant of Eastern life passing by: there were Egyptian officials in broadcloth frock-coats and red fezzes; bare-footed splay-toed fellahin in blue gabardines; veiled women in white making stealthy eyes at passers-by; half-naked gutter-snipes, one with a sprig of scarlet hibiscus behind his ear; travellers from India with solar topees and an air of aloof British superiority; dishevelled sons of the Prophet in green turbans; a stately sheik in a white burnoose; French painted ladies of a professional class with lace-rimmed parasols and provocative glances; a wild-eyed dervish in an accordion-pleated skirt, chewing betel-nut and slightly foaming at the mouth. A Greek bootblack with box adorned with brass plaques tapped his brushes on it to encourage customers; an Egyptian girl squatted in the gutter beside a gramophone; steamers passing into the Canal hooted on their sirens.

Then at the edge of the pavement there sauntered by a young Italian harnessed to a barrel-organ: with one hand he ground out a popular air by Verdi, in the other he held out a tin can for the tributes of music-lovers: a small monkey in a yellow jacket, tethered to his wrist, sat on the top of his instrument. The musician had come opposite the table where Morris sat: Morris liked the gay tinkling tune, and feeling in his pocket for a piesta, he beckoned to him. The boy grinned and stepped up to the rail.

Then suddenly the melancholy-eyed monkey leaped from its place on the organ and sprang on to the table by which Morris sat. It alighted there, chattering with rage, in a crash of broken glass. A flower-vase was upset, a plate clattered on to the floor. Morris's coffee-cup discharged its black contents on the table-cloth. Next moment the Italian had twitched the frenzied little beast back to him, and it fell head downward on the pavement. A shrill hubbub arose, the waiter at Morris's table hurried up with

voluble execrations, a policeman kicked out at the monkey as it lay on the ground, the barrel-organ tottered and crashed on the roadway. Then all subsided again, and the Italian boy picked up the little body from the pavement. He held it out in his hands to Morris.

"E morto," he said.

"Serves it right, too," retorted Morris. "Why did it fly at me like that?"

HE TRAVELLED back to London by long sea, and day after day that tragic little incident, in which he had had no responsible part, began to make a sort of coloring matter in his mind during those hours of lazy leisure on shipboard, when a man gives about an equal inattention to the book he reads and to what passes round him. Sometimes if the shadow of a sea-gull overhead slid across the deck toward him, there leaped into his brain, before his eyes could reassure him, the ludicrous fancy that this shadow was a monkey springing at him.

One day they ran into a gale from the west: there was a crash of glass at his elbow as a sudden lurch of the ship upset a laden steward, and Morris jumped from his seat thinking that a monkey had leaped on to his table again. There was a cinematograph show in the saloon one evening, in which some naturalist exhibited the films he had taken of wild life in Indian jungles: when he put on the screen the picture of a company of monkeys swinging their way through the trees Morris involuntarily clutched the sides of his chair in hideous panic that lasted but a fraction of a second, until he recalled to himself that he was only looking at a film in the saloon of a steamer five miles from the coast of Portugal. He came sleepy into his cabin one night and saw some animal crouching by the locked leather dispatch-case. His breath caught in his throat before he perceived that this was a friendly cat which rose with gleaming eyes and arched its back. . . .

These fantastic unreasonable alarms were disquieting. He had as yet no repetition of the hallucination that he saw a monkey, but some deep-buried "idea," to cure which he had taken two months' holiday, was still unpurged from his mind. He must consult Robert Angus again when he got home, and seek further advice. Probably that incident at Port Said had rekindled the obscure trouble, and there was this added to it, that he knew he was now frightened of real monkeys: there was terror sprouting in the dark of his soul. But as for it having any connection with his pilfered treasure, so rank and childish a superstition deserved only the ridicule he gave it. Often he unlocked his leather case and sat poring over that miracle of surgery which made practical again long-forgotten dexterities.

But it was good to be back in England. For the last three days of the voyage no menace had flashed out on him from the unknown dusks, and surely he had been disquieting himself in vain. . . . There was a light mist lying over Regent's Park on this warm March evening, and a drizzle of rain was falling. He made an appointment for the next morning with the specialist: he telephoned to the hospital that he had returned and hoped to resume work at once. He dined in very good spirits, talking to his man-servant, and, as subsequently came out, he showed him his treasured bones, telling him that he had taken the relic from a mummy which he had seen unwrapped, and that he meant to lecture on it. When he went up to bed he carried the leather case with him. Bed was comfortable after the ship's berth, and

through his open window came the soft hissing of the rain on to the shrubs outside.

His servant slept in the room immediately over his. A little before dawn he woke with a start, roused by horrible cries from somewhere close at hand. Then came words yelled out in a voice that he knew:

"Help! Help!" it cried. "O my God, my God! Ah—h——" and it rose to a scream again.

The man hurried down and clicked on the light in his master's room as he entered. The cries had ceased: only a low moaning came from the bed. A huge ape with busy hands was bending over it; then taking up the body that lay there by the neck and the hips he bent it backward and it cracked like a dry stick. Then it tore open the leather case that was on a table by the bedside, and with something that gleamed white in its dripping fingers it shambled to the window and disappeared.

A doctor arrived within half an hour, but too late. Handfuls of hair with flaps of skin attached had been torn from the head of the murdered man, both eyes were scooped out of their sockets, the right thumb had been plucked off the hand, and the back was broken across the lower vertebræ.

NOTHING has since come to light which could rationally explain the tragedy. No large ape had escaped from the neighboring Zoölogical Gardens, or, as far as could be ascertained, from elsewhere, nor was the monstrous visitor of that night ever seen again. Morris's servant had only had the briefest sight of it, and his description of it at the inquest did not tally with that of any known Simian type. And the sequel was even more mysterious, for Madden, returning to England at the close of the season in Egypt, had asked Morris's servant exactly what it was that his master had shown him the evening before as having been taken by him from a mummy which he had seen unwrapped, and had got from him a sufficiently conclusive account of it. Next autumn he continued his excavations in the cemetery at Gurnah, and he disinterred once more the mummy-case of A-pen-ara and opened it. But the spinal vertebræ were all in place and complete: one had round it the silver clip which Morris had hailed as a unique marvel in surgery.

The Vampire Master

By HUGH DAVIDSON

A thrilling novel of corpses that would not stay dead, and a gruesome horror in the hills of New York

The Story Thus Far

"VAMPIRISM is going on in my village!" This statement has brought Doctor John Dale, specialist in evil, and his assistant, Harley Owen, who tells the story, to the village of Maysville in the New York Catskills. There with Doctor Henderson, who summoned them, they are fighting the visitation of vampires, dead men and women reanimated by evil forces and preying on the living by sucking their blood at night.

Two hundred years before, the Maysville region had been terrorized by a vampire, one Gerritt Geisert, who had been forced to flee. Now the evil is awake again. Allene Ralton, wife of James Ralton and mother of Olivia and Virginia Ralton, died some time before as a vampire victim. Her eldest daughter, Olivia, is now being vampirized also.

Doctor Dale, watching with James Ralton, Owen, Henderson and Edward Harmon, fiancé of Olivia, in the sleeping girl's room by night, see appear the vampire that has been preying on her. It is her own dead mother, Allene Ralton! Dying as a vampire's victim, she has become a vampire herself after death and is preying on her own daughter!

She escapes the watchers, repelled by the power of their crosses. On the heels of this comes a caller, Gerritt Geisert. This Gerritt Geisert had recently returned to Maysville and described himself as a descendant of the vampire-Geisert of two hundred years before, living in the ancient Geisert manor in the hills.

Strange in appearance, his age impossible to guess, Gerritt Geisert is welcomed as a friend by James Ralton and Doctor Henderson. But Doctor Dale unmasks him as the master vampire who has loosed the vampire evil, the Gerritt Geisert of two hundred years before, who has returned, still strong in vampire-life, to prey again on the region. Geisert escapes them, though, boasting that he was the one who vampirized Allene Ralton and that he will have many more victims.

Doctor Dale and the others go the next morning to the cemetery where Allene Ralton's body was entombed, to stop her vampire-activities by driving a stake through her body and severing her head. They find her coffin and body gone, taken by Gerritt Geisert lest his woman-vampire follower be thus destroyed. Also he has taken the coffin and body of young Arthur Newton, another of his victims. Doctor Dale and Owen and Harmon go into the hills to find and destroy the three vampires' bodies.

They search the old Geisert manor but can not find the bodies. They hide in the loft of the manor-house, and at sunset the three vampires, Geisert, Newton and Allene Ralton, wake and appear from a hiding-place in the cellar that holds their coffins and bodies by day. They go forth, and when they return near morning Geisert takes from Newton, his subject-vampire, the very blood that Newton

This story began in WEIRD TALES for October

that night has taken from some living victim. Then with sunrise they go down to their hiding-place and coffins.

Dale and Owen and Harmon locate this hiding-place behind the cellar's thick stone wall but can not break through the wall without tools. They return to the village, intending to return the next day with tools to break through the wall. They find that Dale's safeguards have protected Olivia Ralton during that night, but Henderson has news of a girl in a neighboring estate, Alice Wilsey, who seems also a vampire victim. She was formerly the fiancée of the dead Arthur Newton.

Doctor Dale, Owen and Henderson call at the Wilsey estate and get Mrs. Wilsey's consent to examine her daughter. Alice Wilsey, though, denies that she has had any vampire visitant and acts queerly when they question her. When Doctor Dale uncovers the telltale vampire-punctures on her throat and asks whence they came, Alice Wilsey is seized with a paroxysm of fear and fury.

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9. *A Lover from the Dead*

DOCTOR DALE stood up, his eyes fixed firmly upon the girl, who seemed half in convulsions as her mother bent over her.

"Come," he said to Doctor Henderson and me. "We can do nothing more here now and we'll only make her worse."

We followed him bewilderedly down the stairs and paused in the drawing-room. Doctor Dale's face was serious.

"What does it mean, Dale?" asked Henderson. "That girl is surely a vampire's victim, so bloodless and with those marks on her neck."

"I am sure myself that she is one," Dale said.

"But why does she deny it then?—why does she lie, as she did just now, about what she must at least feel?"

"I have an idea why, though I may be wrong," Dale said. "We'll try to find out—but here comes her mother."

It was a much-agitated Mrs. Beatrice Wilsey who entered the drawing-room. "Doctor Dale, I had a terrible time calming Alice!" she exclaimed. "What on earth is the matter with her?"

"The matter with her," Dale said calmly, "is vampirism! Mrs. Wilsey, a vampire is undoubtedly preying on your daughter."

"A vampire?" repeated Mrs. Wilsey, stupefied. "A person who comes back from the dead?"

Doctor Dale nodded. "Yes, one who comes back from the dead to suck the blood of the living. Is it any wonder that your Alice is so lacking in blood that she is perilously near collapse?"

Mrs. Wilsey seemed stunned. "But it's incredible, horrible! Who that is dead would prey upon my child?"

Dale's face was very grave. "I fear that it is one who has not long been dead and who knew her well in life. I mean Arthur Newton."

"Arthur Newton? Her late fiancé? Good heavens, such a thing can't be possible!"

"It can and is," Doctor Dale said. "But there is a way, Mrs. Wilsey, by which Henderson and Owen and I can find out the truth, tonight. That is for us three to hide in Alice's room, unknown to her, and see whether Newton or any other visitant does come to prey on her.

"Do not refuse!" he said as Mrs. Wilsey started to speak. "It means life or death to your daughter, I think, for she is now so bloodless and weak that to lose any more blood might cause her death at once. It is to protect her tonight that I propose this."

"But how could you hide in Alice's room without her knowing it?" Mrs. Wilsey asked bewilderedly.

"When you take up her dinner, as I suppose you do," Dale said quickly, "we three could slip in while you distract her attention and hide inside the closet I saw in her room. We could watch from there."

Mrs. Wilsey looked from Doctor Dale's grave face to Henderson and me, then made decision. "I'll do as you say! I'm sure you're working to help Alice."

"Good!" said Doctor Dale. "You won't regret it, Mrs. Wilsey. It's but a few hours until night—we can impose on your hospitality for dinner?"

DINNER proved excellent but a rather somber meal, for Mrs. Wilsey was patently oppressed by our dread information, and Doctor Dale was thoughtful and silent. Henderson hardly touched anything, and I will admit that my own appetite was spoiled by the prospect of another vigil like that we had carried out two nights before in Olivia Ralton's room.

By the time dinner ended it was already becoming dark and was time for us to install ourselves in Alice Wilsey's room. Mrs. Wilsey led the way upstairs, carrying a tray of dainty and tempting dishes prepared for her daughter. We followed, Dale carrying his black case.

With a nod to us she went into her daughter's room with the tray, leaving the door a little open. We heard her speaking to Alice and inquiring about her condition. When she coughed, the signal we had agreed on, Doctor Dale softly opened the door.

Alice Wilsey's head was turned away from us, toward her mother, who was engaging her attention by a question. We slipped in noiselessly, over the silken rug, and into the closet whose door Mrs. Wilsey also had opened under some pretext. Dale drew this door almost shut once we were inside, leaving a crack through which we could look out.

The chaise-longue on which Alice Wilsey reclined and the windows in the room's outer wall, outside which was the roof of a porch, were in our line of vision. So was Mrs. Wilsey for a short time, but in a few moments she withdrew, after a nervous glance at the closet in which we were hidden. She left one hooded lamp burning in the room, which was otherwise in darkness.

We three sat silent in the closet and watched. Alice Wilsey lay back as though sleeping, her eyes closed, but stirring slightly now and then. Doctor Dale and I had ready in our hands the crosses which we had found to be the most potent weapons against Gerritt Geisert and his vampires.

Time passed, and as the night grew on the sounds about the Wilsey house lessened as the servants retired. Alice Wilsey, though, was still awake, for now and then she moved restlessly and opened her eyes. Would our watching be fruitless for that reason, I asked myself? If Arthur Newton came and found her awake, would he enter to his victim despite that?

The minutes went slowly by. Dale and Henderson and I crouched silent in the closet, and nothing changed. But gradually the conviction grew on me that Alice Wilsey was staying awake deliberately. She was looking with a sort of nervous anticipation toward the window and porch-balcony beyond it. Her face, as much as we could see it, held combined eager expectation and a shrinking dread.

She was patently waiting, and we three waited also, Dale and Henderson

as tense and silent as myself. The radium dial of my watch told me it was after eleven. Alice Wilsey lay facing the window, her back toward us. Somehow this weird waiting attitude of hers made our own vigil more tense.

There came a sound from outside. The low shuffle of a step on the porch-roof balcony, a form moving there. Doctor Dale's hand closed on my wrist to bid me to be silent as we saw, through the glass, a hand reach and unfasten the window-latch, and swing the window open.

It was Arthur Newton who stood in the window-opening—Newton as we had seen him on the preceding night in Gerritt Geisert's ancient manor in the hills, dressed in the same dark clothes he had worn when buried. His face was as white and waxen as then, his eyes lit still with the red vampire-light!

I EXPECTED a wild scream of horror from Alice Wilsey as he appeared, for the girl was looking straight toward the window. But she did not scream. Instead she stretched out her arms toward Newton and on her face was a look of strange, dread-tinged happiness.

"Arthur!" she murmured. "You've come again—at last!"

Newton stepped into the room, the red vampire-light in his eyes seeming to soften as he looked at her. "I came as soon as I could, Alice," he said, bending over her.

"Dale!" It was Henderson's choking whisper. "Dale, she's welcoming him—she knows he's dead but——"

"Quiet, Henderson!" hissed Doctor Dale fiercely. He was staring out with me at the incredible scene in the dim-lit room.

Arthur Newton had stooped beside the chaise-longue and Alice Wilsey was looking at him with an expression of utter love. Her weak, white face seemed illumined by it. Newton was supporting her in his arms, and she ran her white fingers lingeringly through his dark hair.

I think the most dreadful element of that scene was that Newton's own face showed his love for her. It was visible even through the diabolic waxen mask of his features, forcing itself outward on them.

"Alice, you know I am not now my own master," he was telling her. "*He* rules me now and I can not come to you at will as when I was living."

"When you were living!" Alice Wilsey repeated those terrible words in a sadly reminiscent manner. "Arthur, when you were living you could not have loved me any more than you do now. I know it."

"It's true." Through Arthur Newton's vampire-mask showed a strange sincerity. "I do love you, Alice, the same as then. And I know you love me. For had you not loved me utterly you'd surely have shrunk from me in horror when I first came back this way to you—dead."

"I was horrified, Arthur," the girl told him, "the first time you came. You remember, it was the second night after your funeral, when I woke here and found you bending over me. I wanted to scream and call for help; I was terribly afraid, but all this was weaker than my love for you, and I loved you dead as well as ever I did when you lived.

"And in the times since then you've come, even up to tonight, I've felt dread too, but it's been weaker than my love for you and my hope of your coming. But soon this will be over, soon we'll be together, won't we? I will be like you and we'll come and go together?"

"That will soon be," Arthur Newton affirmed. "You grow weaker each time I come, Alice, and before long you will

die. But it will not really be death, for after it you will be as I now am."

"To be as you are," said Alice Wilsey dreamily. "I am so glad that it is I who have kept you living after death, Arthur —that it is my blood that you have taken and not another's."

It was horror insupportable to hear her utter those words. Terrible as had been the vampirism of Olivia Ralton by her own mother, this willing submission of the girl before us to her vampire-lover was more terrible. Doctor Dale was tense as iron beside me, and Henderson was shaking.

"Yes, my blood that has kept you living after death!" Alice Wilsey exclaimed exultantly. "And I've been only too glad to give it to you."

"The blood," said Arthur Newton in a low tone, his white mask changing now, eyes deeper red. He bent his dead face closer to the girl's living one. "Alice, I must have it again tonight! *He* takes from me almost all that I get from you —I thirst——"

"Take it, Arthur," said Alice Wilsey, throwing her arms wide in a sort of terrible determination. "Take it all if you thirst for it! Every bit, every drop!"

Newton's hand pushed aside her negligee to expose her neck and the red punctures on her throat. The hellish vampire-lust was crimson in his eyes as he bent down toward her neck, lips parted and showing his white teeth, his breath coming in panting sobs of anticipation.

The girl in his arms closed her eyes as though in a very ecstasy of dread anticipation. Newton's head plunged to her throat, his mouth fastening on the punctures there! His eyes flamed with dreadful pleasure as there became audible a sucking sound, as with the fainting, submissive Alice Wilsey in his arms he drained her life-blood!

I COULD stand that dreadful scene no longer, but at that moment Doctor Dale bounded out into the room, I following instantly, toward Arthur Newton and his willing victim.

"Back from her, Newton!" Dale cried, the cross in his hand outstretched. "You'll get no blood from her tonight!"

With a hoarse yell Newton sprang at us but bounded back as he struck the cross's influence. Eyes blazing now with rage, he reached the window. "You!" he yelled. "What brings you here?"

His eyes shifted to the petrified Alice Wilsey. "So you brought them here?" he cried accusingly. "You hid them here to trap me?"

"Arthur, I didn't!" she screamed, struggling up. "I didn't know they were here!"

Doctor Dale made a leap to get behind Newton, to prevent him from escaping into the night, but Newton saw his purpose and jumped backward.

"You'll not trap me so easily!" he cried. "And I thought you still loved me, Alice!"

With a bound he was gone into the darkness. "Arthur, come back!" screamed Alice Wilsey. "I didn't know they were here!"

She flew at Doctor Dale in a wild fury. "You've driven him away!" she cried madly. "I lost him once when he died, and now I'll lose him again and it's your fault!"

She clawed at Dale like a veritable tigress, then went suddenly limp and sagged in his grasp, her strength gone. Doctor Dale deposited her on the lounge, as Mrs. Wilsey burst into the room.

"What's happened?" she cried. "What's the matter with Alice?"

"Plenty," said Dale succinctly. "Owen, get my case. She's lost a little more

blood and we've got to give her a Klein-Lorentz injection."

Swiftly we worked with Henderson, shot the brown fluid into her veins. She stirred a little.

"What happened," Dale told Mrs. Wilsey then, "was that the person vampirizing her came again tonight, and that person was, as I feared, Arthur Newton. She knew all along Newton was really dead, but loves him so that that makes no difference to her, and has been giving her blood willingly to him to maintain his pseudo-life."

"It's too horrible!" Mrs. Wilsey exclaimed.

"It's horrible enough," Dale said, "but I think we can prevent it from going on."

Doctor Henderson, who had gone out of the room a few minutes before, burst back in with white face.

"Dale, I called the Ralton place and they need us!" he cried. "James Ralton said they have been trying to get us—something terrible has happened to Olivia Ralton!"

10. *What Olivia Told*

"WE'LL get over there at once!" Doctor Dale cried. "But we can't leave her without making sure of this girl's safety."

"Doctor, for heaven's sake don't let there be any chance of Arthur Newton's coming again!" said Mrs. Wilsey.

"I don't think he'll come back tonight, but we'll make sure he can't get in," Dale said. "The case, Owen."

From the case he took garlic branches, which we arranged hastily around the doors and windows of the room.

"Mrs. Wilsey, neither Newton nor any other vampire can pass these safeguards if they're left in place," he told her. "See that they're not removed for any reason."

"I will," she said tremulously. "You'll be back, doctor, won't you? I can't fight this terrible thing by myself!"

"We've got to go now to others who need us," Doctor Dale said, "but we'll be back before tomorrow night if it's at all possible. Come, Owen!"

We hurried out, Doctor Dale carrying his case, to Henderson's car. Henderson took the wheel, and the way the elderly physician whirled the car out from the Wilsey estate and over the roads toward the Ralton place showed how much fear the message from the Raltons had inspired in him.

The moon, well toward the west, was hidden almost wholly by clouds and only a feeble light filtered down on the sleeping countryside through which our car raced. That light was enough to show the dark hills brooding westward.

"James Ralton told me only that something terrible had happened to Olivia," Henderson shouted over the motor's roar. "He seemed half crazy."

"We saw that Arthur Newton is out tonight, and that means Gerritt Geisert and Allene Ralton must also be abroad," Dale said grimly. "But Harmon was supposed to be watching Olivia tonight."

The stone pillars at the entrance of the Ralton estate showed in our headlights' glare. Our car shot in between them. The lodge was alight, the dogs barking furiously, and as Henderson whirled the car through the grounds we saw that the big Ralton mansion also blazed with lights.

The butler, Smart, admitted us, and the first person to meet us inside was James Ralton, clad in a dressing-gown, his face again white with fear. Virginia was clinging beside him.

"Dale!" he cried, gripping my companion's arm. "It's Olivia! She's terribly worse—something awful has happened!"

"What has happened, Ralton?" snapped Doctor Dale.

"We don't know yet!" Ralton answered. "Edward was watching Olivia tonight and I had retired to get a little sleep. I woke again an hour ago and being nervous about Olivia went in to see if she was all right.

"She was lying in her bed white and terrible-looking, the window was open and the garlic branches torn down, and Edward Harmon was asleep in a chair. It took minutes to rouse him, he seemed in a sort of stupor. Then we tried to get you."

But Dale was already running up the stairs, Ralton, Virginia, Henderson and I following. We burst in, Henderson keeping Virginia outside, and found Harmon bending over Olivia, trying frantically to revive her.

OLIVIA RALTON lay with her face and skin an absolute waxen white. Her lips were blue and were drawn back in a sort of grin from her teeth. She was breathing slowly, heavily.

"Dale, those hell-vampires have been here again!" Edward Harmon cried. "I was watching Olivia, and a sort of stupor descended on me that made me unconscious, though I fought against it."

Doctor Dale bent over the girl, examining lips and eyes and throat, listening to her heart. Then he straightened.

"You're going to give her a Klein-Lorentz injection?" I asked.

A strange chill came over us at Doctor Dale's answer. "Olivia Ralton is dying," he said solemnly. "No treatment now can save her and maybe we can not even bring her to consciousness before she dies."

"Dying?" repeated Edward Harmon stupefiedly. "Dying? You can't let her die! You've got to keep her living!"

"Dale, don't let her die!" choked James Ralton. "For God's sake don't let her die!"

"I am not superhuman," Dale told them. "Allene Ralton has drained almost the last of Olivia's blood from her, and her heart is steadily slowing. But if we can bring her back to consciousness before she dies we can at least find out from her what happened."

Doctor Dale swiftly took a box of capsules from his case, broke two beneath Olivia's nostrils, then with a hypodermic made an injection above her heart. She stirred weakly as the powerful drugs coursed through her dying frame, and looked dazedly upward.

In that look was the bitterest fear and horror I had ever seen, a horror that struck home to my heart. She looked at Doctor Dale, seemed to recognize him; her eyes flickered as they made out James Ralton, and a faint smile crossed her features at sight of Edward Harmon.

"Mother!" she whispered almost inaudibly. "Mother came here tonight, from the dead—I remember now!"

Dale bent beside her. "Try to tell us what happened, Olivia," he said gently.

"I feel so weak, so strange," she whispered. "Yes, mother was here and it was terrible, what she did. And some one else was with her—it was one of father's friends—Gerritt Geisert."

"Gerritt Geisert!" Dale's exclamation was a groan. "He came with your mother? How did they get in?"

"They came after the dogs barked," she whispered. "I was lying awake and Edward sitting across the room, and then the dogs howled and a moment later Edward went to sleep as suddenly as though some one had commanded him to do so. Somehow I felt terribly afraid, and lay there as though waiting for something.

"In a moment I heard some one mov-

ing on the balcony outside my window and with an effort I turned my head and looked at the window. Two shapes were outside it. One I recognized as Gerritt Geisert, but with a terrible look now on his face that made me shudder. The other was mother, dressed in her shroud as I last had seen her in her coffin.

"Mother and Geisert were looking in at me. Their faces were white and strange and evil and their eyes red as fire. They saw Edward sleeping in a stupor in his chair and laughed at the sight, and I knew that somehow they had cast that stupor on him from outside. And as they looked at me it seemed that on their faces was a terrible desire.

"Geisert reached up to open the window but his hand recoiled as though repulsed by the garlic branches you had put around the windows and between them. They both tried to open the window and could not, nor the other windows, since they could not pass the branches. All that time I lay in a kind of helpless dread, unable to move a muscle or to scream at the top of my lungs as I wanted to do.

"Geisert and mother seemed foiled by the branches and a sort of hope sprang in me that they'd be unable to get in after all. But then Geisert pointed at me and said something to mother. Mother laughed evilly and nodded, then fastened her crimson-lit eyes full upon my own eyes.

"I seemed instantly to lose my own will and to have its place absolutely usurped by my mother's will. I knew she wanted me to take down the branches and open the window to them, and I found myself getting stiffly out of bed, walking mechanically to the window and taking down the branches, and then opening the window and going back stiffly to lie down again in bed.

"I heard mother and Gerritt Geisert laugh as they came in. 'So they tried to keep us out!' Geisert said mockingly. 'So much for their precautions!'

"He and mother came and looked down at me with red-lit, gloating eyes. Mother was bending down over me, her face alight with an evil eagerness, but Geisert thrust her aside.

" 'Your master comes first, Allene,' he said. 'I can take this blood in person tonight and not through you.'

" 'But she is my victim!' hissed mother furiously.

" 'Never fear, I'll leave you some,' Geisert said. 'She has just enough left for both of us.'

"Geisert bent with the words, his crimson eyes on mine, his face working terribly and his bitter, hot breath strong on my own face. I sought to scream and still could move no muscle. His head plunged downward and his lips fastened on the punctures at my throat!

"I felt his lips sucking, and as a terrible giddiness and weakness rushed over me I felt the blood draining out of my veins. It was horror beyond thought and yet somehow at the same time it was also delight, a strange joy mixed with loathing!

"I was losing consciousness entirely when Geisert at last straightened up, his lips dripping blood, his eyes blazing with hideous satiation.

" 'It is your turn now, Allene,' he said, turning. 'I think I have left enough in her to satisfy you.'

"Mother leapt to my side, bent over me. 'Do not fear, Olivia,' she said mockingly. 'After tonight you'll be one of us and will know yourself the taste of young rich blood—warm blood——'

"Her mouth fastened hotly upon my throat and then she too was sucking. I felt the last of my strength going, and

as consciousness left me the last sound I heard was Gerritt Geisert — laughing——"

Olivia Ralton's whisper ceased, and she lay back motionless. Dale hastily broke another capsule under her nostrils. Her eyes re-opened.

"Mother dead—and coming back," she whispered. "Dead and evil—taking my blood with Gerritt Geisert! And they said that I would be one of them, like them!"

"You'll never be one of them, Olivia!" said Doctor Dale solemnly, rising. "Your mother has been caught in Gerritt Geisert's dark web of evil, but she will be released from it and Geisert destroyed!"

Olivia Ralton looked fixedly at him. "I am dying, am I not, doctor?" she asked in her weak whisper.

Dale lowered his head. "Yes, Olivia."

"I want to see father and Virginia—and Edward," she whispered.

As Dale stepped back I saw through the open window that streaks of gray were lighting the dark sky. Dawn was at hand. Henderson brought Virginia into the room. She flung herself upon her sister's bedside in an agony of sobbing. "You're not dying, Olivia—you can't be!" she moaned.

Olivia's hand rested on her hair, then on James Ralton's trembling hand. "I'm not afraid," she whispered. "It will all come right, I think — about mother, I mean."

"Olivia, child!" cried James Ralton. Henderson, his own face deathly, helped him back.

Edward Harmon was bending over the girl, his expression wild. "Olivia, don't die! I'll send those hell-fiends to hell's lowest pit for this!"

"Edward, you heard him say it was not mother's fault," whispered Olivia. "It's Gerritt Geisert's but don't risk yourself——"

She stopped, struggling up almost to a sitting position, and for one dreadful instant it seemed to me that Allene Ralton's crimson eyes looked out of her face toward the first sunlight now streaming in through the northern windows.

"Gerritt Geisert!" she whispered, that dread light in her eyes, then fell back and lay motionless.

11. The Quest in the Hills

DOCTOR DALE drew the sheet slowly over her face. James Ralton stared dazedly at him, while Henderson led the sobbing Virginia from the room. Edward Harmon's face was wild, passionate, terrible.

"She named Gerritt Geisert as she died!" he said chokingly. "Dale, I'm going to destroy that hell-fiend if I live!"

"That is what we must do, yes," Doctor Dale said with voice steely. "But first we've work here with Olivia."

"With Olivia? What do you mean? She's dead now!"

Dale shook his head. "You forget that Olivia died here as a vampire's victim and is now vampire herself! Did you not see her eyes as she died? Tonight unless we prevent it with stake and steel, she will rise and seek victims for herself!"

"You want to drive a stake through her heart and sever her head now?" Ralton cried, and Doctor Dale nodded sternly.

"It's the one sure way to prevent her becoming vampire."

"Dale, you can't!" Ralton cried. "Dale, think how our hearts are torn now—that would crush them, to see her body so treated! Wait until after the funeral, at least, for heaven's sake!"

"Don't kill us all by doing this thing now!" Harmon pleaded. "I'll watch

Olivia's body tonight, Dale, to make sure it doesn't rise. Tomorrow we can hold the funeral and after that you can do it."

"It would be better to do the thing now and be sure," Doctor Dale said, "but I know how you feel. Well, Owen and Henderson and I must get out to the old Geisert place and break through that stone wall behind which lies Gerritt Geisert and his vampires in the day, and use stakes and knives to end their activities for good.

"You, Harmon, can watch over Olivia until we return, to make sure she does not come to vampire-life tonight. Then after the funeral tomorrow we can end her pseudo-life also and, please God, the vampire menace here will be over."

THE next two hours were hurried ones, for there were preparations and arrangements before Doctor Dale and Henderson and I could start out to the Geisert place.

A hurry-call to Maysville brought out from the village one of its two morticians with a coffin for Olivia Ralton. She was placed in it and it was placed in the Ralton library, which became thus the funeral chamber for the next day's ceremonies.

Doctor Dale fastened the coffin securely shut, rubbed garlic leaves around the crack, and laid a cross on top of the coffin. Another cross he gave to Edward Harmon, whom he instructed to keep strict guard over Olivia's coffin and not to open it for any reason.

While Dale was making these arrangements I had been getting from the village the tools we would need to break through the stone wall in the cellar of the Geisert house, heavy crowbars, chisels and sledges.

It was mid-morning when we were ready to start. We drove off in Doctor Henderson's car, James Ralton looking after us from the steps of his ill-fated house with a dazed expression on his white face that wrung my heart.

Henderson, who himself looked more or less stunned by the terrible sequence of events that had been unrolling so rapidly, drove westward at high speed over the bumpy roads, at Doctor Dale's urging. The sacks containing our tools and stakes clanked in the car's bottom at each lurch.

We left our car where we had hidden Harmon's on our former visit, and with Dale and me carrying the sacks, pressed at once into the hills. Greatly as we hurried, though, through the dark hills and down that long narrow valley of ancient, deserted manors, it was well after noon by the time we pushed through the brush into the clearing which held the old and rotting Geisert house.

Doctor Henderson looked with trepidation about the rooms as we entered, but wasting no time we descended at once into the dark cellar.

The stone wall at the south was unbroken as we had left it, but well we knew that it had opened since we left it to allow the three vampires to go forth, Gerritt Geisert and Allene Ralton on their fateful visit to Olivia, and Arthur Newton on the visit to Alice Wilsey that we had overseen and interrupted.

Doctor Dale and I began work at once on the wall. Our plan was to pry out one of the massive blocks near the floor, which would make an aperture large enough to permit us to crawl into the secret space behind, which must hold the coffins of the three vampires.

Dale held the chisel while I swung the sledge. It was monotonous and tiring work, and the blocks were of hard native granite that resisted our steel stoutly. The cellar rang with my sledge-blows on the chisel's head, Henderson standing by and

holding the flashlight on which we depended for illumination.

After some minutes of this I was forced to let Dale take the sledge while I rested in holding the chisel. We alternated thus for some time, and soon both of us were sweating despite the dankness of the cellar. But what worried us was not the hardness of the toil but the slowness of our progress. At the end of two hours' steady work we had not cut a third of the way through around the big block.

Dale glanced occasionally at his watch in a nervous manner as we worked on, and I knew what was in his mind. The afternoon was waning and we must break through before sunset; for at sunset the three who now lay inside stiff and helpless would awake to all their hideous vampire life. We drove our tired muscles to greater efforts as the afternoon drew near its end.

We were almost through around the block but it was evident that on its inner side it was faced with some hard cement, and we guessed that this joined it to the blocks around it so that they could move together when the secret method of opening was used. At last, though, our chisels drove through this also and the block had been freed completely from those around it.

Using the chisels and the crowbars we had brought as levers, we sought to pry the great block out of its place in the wall. Henderson lent his aid and the three of us tugged desperately at the bars. With a slow grating, the great stone slid outward, then tumbled to the cellar floor. A dark recess was disclosed behind!

We straightened, panting, and Doctor Dale glanced quickly at his watch. "An hour yet before sunset!" he said. "We'll have time enough — give me the light, Henderson."

He flashed the beam inside the recess, which was itself stone-lined and about ten feet square. We stared.

"There are no coffins or bodies here!" I cried. "Dale, it's empty!"

Doctor Dale was thunderstruck. He flashed the beam back and forth around the empty recess. "But they must be here!" he said desperately. "We heard them go down in here yesterday morning!"

A thought struck me. "Dale, you remember we chipped at the stones here yesterday morning trying to get in!"

"Yes. But that doesn't explain why the coffins and bodies of Geisert and Allene Ralton and Newton aren't here."

"It does!" I said. "When Gerritt Geisert came forth from here last night at sunset he must have seen the marks we left on the stones, despite our efforts to efface them. He'd know that some one knew where their bodies lay by day and was trying to get at them, and he'd——"

"He'd take his coffin and have the other two take theirs to some other hiding-place!" Dale finished. "You're right, Owen, it's what's happened! Geisert has been too much for us again!"

"But what are we to do?" asked Doctor Henderson tensely. "It will soon be sunset."

Doctor Dale thought. "We must search for Geisert's new hiding-place," he said, "must find where the coffins of the three now lie. It can't be terribly far from here."

"What about the other old deserted manor-houses in this valley?" I suggested. Dale's eyes lit.

"I believe you've hit it, Owen! Any one of them would make a good hiding-place for the three coffins and bodies."

"But which one?" Henderson said. "Dale, there are a dozen of those old places along this valley."

"We'll search the nearest ones — the

ones at this end of the valley," Dale said. "If we don't find the coffins in them we'll go on to the others—we can't give up now."

We hastened up and out of the ancient Geisert house. The sun was sinking toward the western horizon, and sunset, the awakening time of the three vampires we sought, was not far off.

THE nearest of the other deserted manor-houses was one on the other side of the valley and a half-mile or more nearer the village. We headed toward it, still carrying our sacks of implements, Doctor Dale leading at a rapid rate and Henderson and I close behind him.

We pushed through brush and briars, across the overgrown road at the valley's center and up the opposite slope toward the old house. When we arrived there we found it a rotting structure in even greater decay than the Geisert place.

Rapidly we searched through its rotting rooms and damp cellar and the broken ruins of its outbuildings, Dale even flashing our beam down the old, dried-up well. But there was no sign of the coffins we sought. The sun was setting as we headed northeastward up the valley toward the next old place.

Henderson pointed to the crimson sunset. "Dale, even if we find the coffins now, Geisert and the rest will have awaked!"

"I know," Doctor Dale said grimly, "but we'll know where the coffins are and can wait until they come back to them, can wait until morning and then end the three."

Twilight was darkening as we reached the second old house, and we had to use the flashlight to search its ruins. Its wooden walls had fallen in several places and we pulled aside enough of the decaying debris to make sure that what we sought was not concealed there, then went on up the valley to the next place.

Night lay black and heavy over the valley by then, the sky clouded and hiding the moon. We plunged on through the night, fighting through the thick brush with clothes and skin torn, having difficulty even in finding the places we sought, and more difficulty in searching them. And our search was the more tense because we knew that now Geisert and his two vampires must be fully awake and possessed of all their hideous powers.

More than four hours had passed and we had searched five of the valley's deserted manors, those in its southwestern half, when Doctor Dale halted. We were out of breath, reeling from fatigue, with clothing in tatters and skins bleeding from countless scratches.

"There are still seven places we haven't searched," Doctor Henderson said. "The Van Broot and Salton and Elphin places and four others."

"We're not going to search them now," Dale said. "It's near midnight and I think we'd best get back to Ralton's and the village. I'm uneasy."

"Why? You think something's wrong?" I asked quickly.

"I don't know," Doctor Dale said. "But we know Geisert and the other two must be awake tonight and abroad. We've not seen them in the valley here and if they've gone in again——"

"You're right," I said. "We'd better get back. We can come back in the morning and search the other places."

So we headed out of the long valley, using our flashlight to guide us along the half-obliterated road. We looked continually about us for sight of the three vampires we knew must be abroad, but saw nothing of them.

In the darkness we could not hurry much, and it was after two in the morn-

ing when we finally emerged from the hills and reached Henderson's car. Dead-tired as we were, we wasted not a moment but started eastward, Doctor Dale driving.

"I've been thinking, Owen," Dale said as he drove, "that what handicaps us most in our fight against these vampires is that we have no offensive weapon against them when they come against us by night in their pseudo-life. We can keep them out with the garlic repellent to all vampires and can repel them with the cross when they attack us, but have nothing to use against them in return.

"It's occurred to me that we could use the powers of the cross more effectively against them by casting cross-shaped bullets, firing them from regular cartridges and regular pistols. The vampires would not be proof against them as against ordinary bullets, and if a cross-shaped bullet entered their bodies it would, I have no doubt, paralyze them completely and make them helpless."

"It's an idea, Dale!" I cried. "It would give us a chance against them by night, even if we could not find their coffins and bodies by day."

"We'll try it," Dale said. "God knows we need all the weapons we can get; for so far the score in this struggle has been all on the side of Geisert and his vampires."

IT WAS after three when our car turned in at the Ralton estate again. The big house was quiet, only a few lights glowing.

A sleepy-looking Smart admitted us and James Ralton was just coming down the stairs into the dim-lit hall as we entered.

"You succeeded?" he cried eagerly. "You found the coffins and bodies?"

Dale shook his head, and Ralton's haggard face became more drawn as he heard how Geisert had eluded us.

"We came back in because we feared Geisert might have come again," Dale said. "Nothing's happened, though? I mean to Olivia's body?"

"No, Edward has been watching it and hasn't left the library," Ralton said. "I looked in on him two hours ago and was just coming down again when you came."

He walked back with us to the door of the library and opened it. We started through the door, then cried out together.

The window of the dim-lit library was swinging open to the night! The coffin of Olivia Ralton was gone from the stand that had supported it! And Edward Harmon lay in a crushed, crumpled heap near the window, blood flowing from his mouth and nose.

We sprang across the room to him, Dale bending over him and raising him in his arms. Harmon stirred a little in Dale's arms and opened his eyes. His lips moved, and from them came a choking whisper.

"Sorry—got me," he whispered. "Came an hour ago—Geisert—Olivia——"

"Gerritt Geisert took Olivia's body and coffin?" Dale asked him fiercely. "He did this to you?"

Harmon's head nodded weakly. He seemed to gather his strength to speak. "I was watching Olivia's coffin," he whispered. "Had a cross in my hand, and another cross lay on the coffin where you'd left it. I was thinking of Olivia as she'd been when alive, when I heard Olivia speaking, inside the coffin!

"She was crying out faintly to me from inside the coffin. 'Edward, let me out!' she cried. 'I'm smothering here!'

"I sprang to the coffin. 'Good God, Olivia!' I cried. 'Is it you that's speaking?'

"Her faint voice came from inside.

'Yes, Edward—you must let me out, at once!'

"My hands flew to open the coffin when I remembered suddenly what you'd said about Olivia becoming vampire and waking tonight after death, and your orders not to open the coffin in any case.

" 'I can't let you out, Olivia!' I cried. 'You're dead—Dale said you were dead!'

" 'He was wrong!' her voice answered. 'Edward, I'm as alive as you are—I woke just now in this terrible thing and I'm stifling, suffocating! Edward, if you love me, save me, let me out!'

"I could stand it no more, for it was Olivia, whom I had loved, crying to me to save her from a horrible death. I unfastened the coffin's bolts, flung open the lid, the cross on it falling to the floor and my own cross dropping from my hand in my haste.

"Olivia sat up in the coffin! She seemed as alive as ever and in better health than I had seen her for weeks, her cheeks flushed and her eyes brilliant. Holding me with her eyes, she stepped to the floor. Then she put her arms round my neck, her face close to mine.

" 'Edward, my love, you have saved me from a terrible end,' she said.

" 'Olivia, is it really you?' I asked, dazed. 'Are you really alive?'

" 'Of course I am,' she answered with a silvery laugh. 'See, I will kiss you and prove it to you.'

"Her mouth met mine, and it was icy cold! And somehow at its touch my strength seemed to leave me. I was aware that she was holding me in her arms and that her mouth was now on my neck, that her teeth were denting the skin of my throat as though to bite it in the next moment.

"But at that moment came an interruption. The window was flung open and Gerritt Geisert and Allene Ralton entered, just the same in appearance as when we saw them out at the Geisert place. Olivia turned to them at the interruption, her eyes blazing.

" 'So you have awakened already and found a victim!' Geisert said. 'But there's no time for that now—later you will have victims in plenty but now we must be quick and get out of here with your coffin.'

" 'But his blood is mine—I won't go until I have it!' cried Olivia, still holding me, in a sort of daze, in her arms.

" 'I say no and I am master!' thundered Geisert, his eyes hell-red. 'You will learn now to obey me as the others do.'

"Olivia cringed before his glare and let me go. Geisert closed her coffin and seized it. At that my daze left me and with a cry I sprang at him. He grasped me, hurled me like a doll toward the floor with terrific force, and I heard my bones crack as I struck.

"I lay there with consciousness going as Geisert again seized Olivia's coffin, carrying it unaided, and then with Olivia and Allene Ralton following him, and a fiendish laugh from the two women, he was gone with it out the window! And I lay, unable to call and with my life going, until you came but now!"

12. Stake and Steel

EDWARD HARMON'S eyes closed and for an instant I thought that death had come. But his eyelids flickered, opened again.

"Dale, I know I'm dying," he whispered. "I felt my spine crack when I struck the floor. I wouldn't care so much, if I were not leaving Olivia——"

"Leaving Olivia one of Gerritt Geisert's vampires," Doctor Dale finished for him. "We'll release her from that, Harmon, never fear, and end Geisert."

"But be careful with Geisert," warned

Harmon in his weak whisper. "He is more powerful than we thought—is——"

Blood welled suddenly anew from his lips, he quivered violently, then lay limp in Dale's supporting arms. Doctor Dale lowered him gently, then briefly examined his throat. There were no punctures in its skin.

Dale stood up. "At least he did not die as Olivia's victim," he said, "and is now of the truly dead and not the dead-alive."

"Harmon dead?" Ralton seemed unable to comprehend. "And Olivia's body and coffin gone!"

"Yes, Gerritt Geisert's subservient vampires now number three!" Dale exclaimed. "First Allene Ralton, then young Arthur Newton, now Olivia Ralton, and now some one else soon if we do not destroy this ever-widening circle of evil!"

He turned to Ralton. "You heard no disturbance an hour ago? Surely the dogs must have barked when Geisert and Allene Ralton came?"

James Ralton shook his head. "No, Dale, they made no sound, and I can understand that. For yesterday afternoon the lodge-keeper came in to tell me that the dogs would not leave their kennels and made no sound but continual low whines of terror."

"They've been cowed to silence by these recurrent vampire visits," Dale said. "That means we can no longer depend on their warnings."

"Dale, what are we to do?" Doctor Henderson demanded desperately. "Olivia vampire—Harmon dead—is this horror to go on and on?"

"We can do nothing but keep fighting it," Dale said sternly. "Our best course is to try the idea I spoke of as we were returning, the cross-shaped bullets. We'll make some and as soon as we have them will start out there into the hills, by day or night, and hunt down Gerritt Geisert and his vampires.

"In the meantime," he added to James Ralton, "before leaving here I want you to call Miss Virginia. She must be told everything that has happened."

"Everything?" Ralton said. "Dale, we can't tell her how her own mother vampirized Olivia, how Olivia is now a vampire too?"

"We must," Doctor Dale said firmly. "Don't you see what I'm thinking of? Didn't I tell you that the vampire comes back always to prey on its nearest kin? Allene Ralton came back to prey on Olivia, and what if Olivia now came——"

"To make a victim of Virginia?" Ralton cried. "Oh, Dale, this horror is unhinging my mind! But you're right—she must be warned."

When Virginia Ralton came she was so stunned to find Harmon dead that it took minutes for her to appreciate the horror of what Doctor Dale, as clearly as possible, told her of the way in which her mother and now her older sister had become vampires.

"So if you see Olivia seemingly living from now on you'll know it is not really Olivia but a thing of evil in her shape," Dale finished, "a thing infinitely to be feared.

"Keep crosses and sprays of garlic over all this house's doors and windows from now on," he added to James Ralton. "I'll leave them here for you to put up—they only can repel vampire visitations."

"Dale, the servants know that something ghastly has been going on here, and they're whispering," James Ralton said. "I'm afraid they'll leave, they're so fearful."

"Well, if they do, get some one else here at once," Dale said. "That young Hugh Rillard would come, no doubt, and

of course we'll come any time you want us.

"Henderson and Owen and I are starting back to the village now, and we'll arrange to have them come for Edward Harmon's body and take it to his home."

"Dale, on the way back hadn't we better stop at the Wilsey place?" I said. "If Geisert and Allene Ralton were here it means that Arthur Newton too must have been abroad!"

"You're right!" Dale exclaimed. "In the horror here I'd forgotten the Wilsey girl. We'd best get started now."

DAWN was breaking as our car turned out from the Ralton grounds and the sun was rising by the time we drove into the Wilsey estate.

Twice Doctor Dale rang without answer at the door and was reaching to ring again when the door was flung open and Mrs. Wilsey was disclosed, her face white and wild. She literally fell upon Dale.

"Doctor Dale!" she cried. "Thank God you've come! I didn't know where I could get you! Alice——"

"She's worse?" Dale said, and then without waiting for Mrs. Wilsey's answer, dashed up the stairs, we following in haste.

We burst into the girl's room to find Dale bending over Alice Wilsey. One glance at her made my heart stand still—she was a replica in whiteness and waxenness, in the way in which her lips were drawn back and in her slow, heavy breathing, of Olivia Ralton when we had found her dying on the morning before!

Her blue eyes stared up at us unrecognizingly, her lips moving soundlessly. Doctor Dale swiftly tested her heart and lung action, then cast a glance around the room, noting as I had already done that the window giving on the porch-balcony swung a little open and that the garlic sprays that had hung upon it had been torn down. He looked back down at the girl.

"She can live but for minutes," he said slowly, heavily. "Her blood too has been drained almost entirely from her body."

"Doctor, you can't mean it!" cried Mrs. Wilsey, but Dale motioned silence suddenly as Alice Wilsey's efforts to speak became faintly audible.

"Arthur," she was murmuring in the faintest of whispers, "came in the night —I took down branches and opened to him—still thought I had tried to trap him the night before and was still angry.

"Still angry——" As her voice failed a moment I wondered what terrible scene here in the night between the girl and her vampire-lover those words covered. "Said he'd — take all my blood this time—took and took—strength—Arthur——"

Her body jerked, then lay still, eyes closing, drawn bloodless face settling almost at once into more natural lines.

Mrs. Wilsey flung herself on the dead girl, sobbing, crying, striving futilely to restore her.

Dale stood up, his face like iron. "Get the sacks of tools from the car, Owen," he said between his teeth.

"Dale, you're going to——" Henderson began.

"We're going to use stake and steel at once upon this dead girl who died a vampire's victim!" Doctor Dale rasped. "We're going to take no chance of her escaping us as Olivia Ralton did!"

"You're going to mangle Alice's body?" cried Mrs. Wilsey. "No, you can't—you can't!"

"We must and we will!" Dale exclaimed. "Unless we do, your Alice becomes tonight a fiend of evil like Arthur Newton himself, and goes forth dead in a terrible mockery of life!

"Get the sacks of tools, Owen!" he directed again, and I sped down to the car and in a moment was back with them.

"Take Mrs. Wilsey to another room, Henderson," Dale ordered, and the physician, as though glad himself to escape, supported the half-conscious woman and led her from the room.

"Now, Owen," said Dale, removing his coat and rolling up his sleeves, which example I followed. "One of the stakes and the sledge—you hold the stake and I'll drive it."

I handed him the sledge and then took the heavy wooden stake, one of the several Dale had prepared before. It was four feet in length, sharpened to a point at one end and that point hardened.

At Doctor Dale's direction I set the point of the stake against the body of Alice Wilsey directly over the heart, holding it upright. An irrepressible shudder ran through me.

Dale placed a chair beside me and then stood upon it so that he was at a height at which he could effectively wield the sledge on the stake's head. He paused with the sledge upraised, looking down at the motionless form. Alice Wilsey lay with closed eyes and peaceful face as though sleeping.

"Remember to hold the stake firm no matter what happens," he warned me. "It must go through the heart."

"I will—go ahead," I said.

Dale swung the sledge back over his shoulder and then down with terrific force on the top of the stake. I felt the stake in my hands drive down through flesh and bone for inches into the girl's body.

No blood streamed from that terrible penetration, but Alice Wilsey's eyes opened, blazing up at us, and as her body writhed in mad, snake-like convulsions there came from her a terrible scream!

I held the stake steady despite her wild convulsions, and again Doctor Dale's sledge fell upon it to drive it deeper. The girl twisted at the second blow so that I could hardly hold the stake, her body writhing like that of a snake transfixed by a spear! Steady screams, curses, entreaties came from her lips, her blazing blue eyes widened as though in utter agony.

Dale struck again, and this time the stake's sharp end penetrated clean through her body. At once Alice Wilsey's mad movements ceased, she lay motionless again with closed eyes, and with peace, a real peace this time, upon her drawn white face.

With the implements from our sacks we cut off the stake level with her breast, then severed her head. That done, Doctor Dale covered her motionless form, and with our sacks of tools, beads of sweat standing out on our foreheads, we went out of the room.

Mrs. Wilsey waited with Henderson downstairs, and Doctor Dale placed his hand on her shoulder.

"It's done," he told her simply, "and your Alice is now of the truly dead and not of the hideous dead-alive as she would have been.

"Do not go to look at her," he said. "I'll send an undertaker in from the village and explain things to him. But there is nothing further to fear—here."

We left her like a woman stunned, and drove through the morning sunlight to the village.

As we got out of the car at Henderson's house, Dale swayed a little. "I've got to have sleep," he said thickly, "and you too, Owen. We'll have to put off the making of the cross-bullets until tonight.

"You see the undertaker, Henderson,"

he said. "Explain by any plausible story the condition of Alice Wilsey's body, and also that of Edward Harmon's. You'll have to tell them something to account for the disappearance of Olivia Ralton's body, too—tell them the funeral is being postponed or something like that."

Doctor Dale and I slept heavily for hours that day, as much exhausted by the mental strain of the horrors through which we had passed as by the physical exertion of our watch two nights before at the Wilsey house, our dash to the dying Olivia Ralton, our toilsome expedition to and search through the valley in the hills, and our return to the Ralton and Wilsey places.

In fact I was still sleeping deeply when Dale woke me, at six in the evening. He had already been up a few hours, I found, and had already begun the fabrication of the cross-shaped bullets which we hoped would prove a more effective weapon against Gerritt Geisert and his vampire crew than any we had hitherto had.

The vampire horror culminates in the exciting chapters that bring this story to a close in next month's WEIRD TALES.

The Closed Door

By HAROLD WARD

The hate of a dying man lingered in the room of death for years before it manifested itself—a brief story of a terrible retribution

DYING, Obie Marsh cursed his wife as he had cursed her every day of their wedded life.

"You've poisoned me!" he gasped, writhing in agony. "Yes, you've poisoned me, you she-devil!"

Lucinda, his wife, nodded dully.

"Yes, I poisoned you," she answered without emotion. "You are going to die, anyway; the doctor said so. It's just a matter of time — maybe years, maybe months. And I can't stand this fightin' any longer. Fifteen years of it! Fifteen years of hell!"

"Damn you!" Marsh snarled through his clenched teeth, his bearded face twitching as a spasm of pain shot through his vitals.

"We should have never got married," the woman went on quietly. "I never loved you and you never loved me. 'T was a case of your folks and my folks stickin' in between us and the ones we loved. You've always hated me 'cause of Lizzie Roper, an' God knows I wanted t' marry Al Sides. Just 'cause they wanted the farms joined, they made us get married, me an' you. Now we can't get a divorce 'cause of the church and I've just got sick of it all, Obie—sick of it all."

"You hellion!" he gasped, his body twitching spasmodically.

"I got the idee of poisoning you when you first took sick," she went on in the same even tone. "Old Doc Plummer said that you might linger along for years. And I just couldn't stand it, Obie—I just couldn't stand it any longer, your constant bullyin' an' runnin' over me."

"You'll hang for it," Marsh said huskily. "I hope they torture you in hell——"

"Probably they will," Lucinda Marsh answered without emotion. "But it's worth it t' have a little peace here on

earth. It hasn't been any heaven livin' with you."

Marsh twisted convulsively, his gnarled fingers closing and unclosing, his thick lips drooling. He pulled himself together with a mighty effort. He was a hard man and strong; hard men are difficult to kill.

"I'll come back . . . from th' grave, you hussy!" he gasped.

"'T would be like you," his wife answered.

". . . Waitin' for . . . you——" he went on, trying to shake his fist in the woman's face.

The effort was too great. He dropped back upon the pillow again, the sweat standing out on his forehead in beads, his body shaking with spasms.

"God, it hurts!" he whispered. "Just like a . . . knife."

The woman suddenly lifted her head. She was listening.

"Somebody coming," she muttered, moving swiftly to the window.

A roadster was entering the lane.

"It's old Doc Plummer," she said, half to herself, half to the dying man. "Th' old fool's earlier'n usual. An' you c'n still talk."

The man on the bed quivered. His fists clenched and his muscles tensed as he tried to drag himself back from the yawning pit that awaited him.

". . . Getting . . . dark——"

"Doc's liable to rec'nize th' symptoms," the woman went on as she heard the car come to a stop in the front yard. A sheet had been thrown carelessly across the foot of the bed. Seizing it, she wadded it into a bundle and pressed it against the face of the dying man. He fought against the stoppage of his breath with a feeble effort. She threw her whole strength against him. Suddenly his limbs straightened jerkily. She knew that he was dead. She sat up with a sigh of relief.

The outside screen door slammed shut. Leaping to her feet, she threw the sheet across the back of a chair and turned to meet the doctor.

"He just passed away in one of those spells," she said without emotion. "Come on him all of a sudden. Both th' kids are at school and I didn't have nobody to send for you. 'Tain't no use to say I'm sorry, for I'm not. I'm glad he's dead."

The physician shook his head sympathetically. Like all country practitioners, he was conversant with the family affairs of his patients. For a moment he stood looking down at the still form of Obie Marsh. Then he pulled a sheet over it and turned to the woman.

"Better sit down and take things easy, Mrs. Marsh," he said, following her into the other room. "I'll notify the undertaker and stop at the school and have the teacher send Mary and Jimmy home. Anybody else you want?"

She shook her head negatively.

"Tell Bill Reynolds to come prepared t' take th' body back with him," she said slowly. "This is my house, now—mine. That's th' way my pap and his pap fixed up th' deeds. An' the quicker I get him outen my sight, th' better it'll suit me. I never want t' see him again 'till th' day of th' funeral, an' I wouldn't 'tend that if it wasn't that people'd talk.

"He made life hell for me," she went on bitterly. "I've hated him from th' day I married him. It's my house now and I'm goin' t' lock that room as soon's they take him away. I never want t' see th' inside of it again. There's too many mem'ries hovering around it. I'd burn it to th' ground if it wasn't for burnin' th' rest of th' house."

She dropped into a rocking-chair and gazed at the doctor, her gaunt body quivering with unshed tears. The physician patted her on the shoulder sympathetically.

"You're overwrought, Lucinda," he said kindly, "overwrought and nervous. I'll fix up a tonic and bring it over tonight."

"I don't need no tonic," she responded. "Knowin' he's dead'll be tonic enough for me."

The physician wagged his head solemnly.

"Let's not speak ill of the dead," he said. "Everybody knows how he treated you. If there's nothing else I can do, I'll be getting along."

In due time the undertaker and his assistant came with their narrow wicker basket. Lucinda Marsh stood beside the door and waited for them as they carried their burden out. They looked at her queerly as she turned the key in the lock, then, removing it, placed it in her pocket.

"I hope t' God I never see th' inside of that room till my dyin' day," she said.

Bill Reynolds, the undertaker, shook his head in agreement. He, too, knew the life that she had led with Obie Marsh.

THE passing years brought little change in the outward appearance of Lucinda Marsh. Gaunt, hard-featured, tight-lipped and unemotional, she moved about the farm as of yore, doing a man's work in the field, adding to the dollars that were already in the bank, conducting her business along the lines to which she had been trained. She had never had friends; Obie Marsh had seen to that. She made none now.

Her children grew to manhood and womanhood. Little Mary married and moved to the adjoining township. Lucinda made no complaint and no comment. Jimmy took the place of the hired man, lifting a bit of the burden of labor from his mother's shoulders. But she still held the reins of management. Then he, too, married and brought his wife to the big, gloomy old house at the end of the lane. Children came, six in quick succession. If their happy laughter wrought any change in the heart of the grim, silent old woman, she never showed it. Emma, Jimmy's wife, busy rearing her brood, was content to remain in the background; Lucinda Marsh was still mistress of the house.

Through all the years that one room just off from the parlor—Father's room, they called it—remained closed, the key hidden away in Lucinda's bureau drawer. It was never mentioned in the family circle. The children knew that there was something — some horrible taboo — that kept it from being talked about. Their childish imaginations did the rest. They passed it with baited breath; when darkness fell and shadows hovered outside the circle made by the big kerosene lamp on the center table, they always played on the other side of the room, casting furtive glances toward the dark panels behind which lurked they knew not what.

Then, with the passing of the years, came the hard times. First the grasshoppers destroyed the crops. Then came the drought. Prices went up; wages dropped. Factories closed.

Mary was the first to feel the blow. The bank foreclosed on her husband's farm. Then came illness and another baby. Finally she was forced to come home with her sick husband and her little brood. Lucinda Marsh, as unemotional as ever, made room for them. Jimmy's wife's brother lost his place in the city. Destitute, he appealed to his sister. She told her troubles to Lucinda Marsh.

"Four more won't make no difference at th' table," the old woman said grimly. "Write an' tell 'em we'll make room for 'em somehow. Goodness knows, though, where we'll sleep 'em."

They were sitting at the supper table

when this conversation took place. It was Mary who, with a quick glance at her brother, ventured to speak that which was in all of their minds.

"Father's room," she said timidly. "Couldn't we open that up and air it before they come and let 'em sleep in there?"

For a moment there was an awed silence. Lucinda Marsh turned her sunken eyes on her daughter, then glanced at the faces of the others.

"I vowed that I'd never set foot in that room 'till my dyin' day," she said finally.

"But they — they wouldn't be you, Mother," Mary argued. "And we're cramped for room right now. Where else can we sleep 'em?"

Lucinda Marsh quietly laid down her knife and fork, her thin lips set in a straight, grim line.

"If anybody sleeps in that room, 't will be me," she said finally. "I lived with your father for fifteen years, hatin' him every day more'n more. And he hated me worse'n I hated him—if such a thing is possible. The room's filled with our hatred—it's locked up in there smolderin' an' ready t' be fanned into flame again."

"But, Mother——"

Lucinda Marsh straightened her bent old shoulders with a gesture of finality.

"I'll move into it," she said grimly.

"I wish that I hadn't mentioned it," Mary said regretfully. "I knew that there was some sort of sentiment attached to it, but——"

The old woman cut her off.

"Sentiment! Hate, you mean," she snapped. "But maybe it's for th' best. I'm an old woman—'way past seventy. I'm about due to die, anyway."

She stopped, her aged eyes taking on a far-away look.

"Maybe it's foreordained," she said, half to herself. "He said that he'd be . . . waitin' for me. Maybe he is. Who knows?"

She rose from the table and took a step toward the door.

"I'll open it up in the mornin' and let it air out," she said.

She moved up the stairway to the upper floor, her lips straight and tight.

FOR a long time Lucinda Marsh sat in the straight-backed chair beside her bed, her weary eyes gazing into vacancy while the panorama of the years unfolded itself. To her had come a great urge, a desire which she had kept in leash for close to half a century—the longing that comes to all murderers—a yearning to visit the scene of her crime.

A thousand times before, the same desire had swept over her and she had always fought it off. Now, however, with the fulfilment of her wish only a few hours away there had come to her a seeming need for haste. The closed room was calling to her. Within her brain a voice was shrieking: *"Now! Now!"* To her aged mind it was the voice of the man she hated—the man she had killed.

Getting up, she went to the bureau and, opening the drawer, found the key where she had hidden it so many years before. She held it in her gnarled fingers, fondling it, crooning over it.

Her room was at the head of the stairs. One by one, she heard the members of the household go to their rooms. Finally the gloomy old house was filled with an indescribable quietness.

Rising, she opened the door a tiny crack and peered out into the dark hallway. Satisfied that all were asleep, she picked up the small hand-lamp and tiptoed furtively down the creaking stairs.

A storm was in the air. She could hear the wind rising and shrieking through the

branches of the trees. There was something reminiscent about the mournful wail. She stopped a moment, her head bent forward. Then remembrance swept over her.

" 'T was like this th' night before—before he died," she muttered to herself.

Her heart was beating a trifle faster as she reached the dark, grim door. She hesitated an instant. Then, transferring the lamp to her left hand, she inserted the key in the lock. It turned hard, as if reluctant to reveal the mysteries it hid. Then the tumbler shot back. For a moment she waited, her fingers on the knob. She was trembling now—shaking with an emotion she did not understand.

"He said that . . . he'd be . . . waitin' for me," she murmured. "I wonder . . . if he is."

She turned the knob and pushed against the panel. The aged hinges squeaked protestingly. Then the door swung open. A wave of malignancy and hatred surged over her.

She stepped inside, her lips closed in a tight, grim line. Just inside the door she waited, the lamp held high above her head, her eyes taking in every detail. There was the bed, unmade, where he had died. The thought came to her that Bill Reynolds, the undertaker, the last person to step foot in the room, was gone, too. At the head of the bed was the little stand; on top of it was the glass in which she had administered the poison. Beside it was a bottle of medicine, half empty; the label, covered with old Doc Plummer's crabbed hieroglyphics, was yellow and faded. Doc Plummer . . . he, too, had been festering in his grave for years. There was the pillow where Obie's head had rested when he died; one corner was twisted where he had held it when the last spasm of agony had knifed its way through his vitals. Nothing was changed.

"He said that he'd . . . be waitin' for me," she said again.

The room was musty and mildewed, the dust of years over everything. She closed the door and set the lamp upon the little stand. Going to the window, she pushed it up to its full length. The wind swept in, howling and shrieking.

The lamp sputtered, causing queer, grotesque shadows to dance in the distant corners. Across the back of the chair where she had thrown it years before was the yellowed sheet with which she had smothered the dying breath out of her husband. There was a darker spot upon its mildewed surface; she knew it for the spittle that had drooled from his mouth.

She moved to the center of the room, still peering furtively into the shadows.

"He said that he'd come . . . back from th' grave an' be . . . waitin' for me," she said again and again.

A fresh gust of wind howled through the window. The lamp sputtered, smoked, flared up, then went out.

With the sudden darkness came a feeling of dread. For the first time in her life Lucinda Marsh was afraid.

Out of the darkness came a thing—a shapeless thing of white. For a moment it hung suspended in midair. It hovered over her, its long, shapeless arms reaching out for her. The wind shrieked with merry gusto.

". . . said that he'd be waitin'——" she murmured.

It swept over her, holding her in its folds, twisting about her, smothering her. . . .

"God!" she shrieked, clawing at the enveloping tentacles. "He kept his word! He was . . . waitin'——"

In the morning they found her. Twisted about her head and throat was a yellowed sheet—the sheet with which she had smothered her husband.

The Lady in Gray

By DONALD WANDREI

An exquisitely told story is this—about the strange woman and the loathsome gray slug that came to the sleeper in his dreams

DURING the whole of my life, the hours from sunset to sunrise, when other people sleep, have been oppressive with fear. Since early childhood, I have been subject to terrifying dreams, from which neither physicians nor psychologists have been able to offer me the slightest relief. Doctors could find no organic derangement save for a few minor troubles such as are common to all men. My life has been singularly free of accidents, shocks, tragedies, and misfortunes. Financial worries have never beset me. I have pursued my career, at which success came steadily. Psychiatrists have devoted months to analyzing me, probing my life, my emotional development, my conscious and subconscious minds, hypnotizing me, making innumerable tests, and searching for secret fears or obsessions that might account for my nightmares, but in vain. Sedatives, opiates, dieting, travel, rest: these have been urged upon me at one time or another, and I have tried them without success. To doctors, I am a healthy man of thirty-four. To psychiatrists, I am a mentally sound, normal, and balanced person whose extraordinary dreams they either discount or discredit.

This is no comfort for me. I have come to dread the hours when night approaches. I would gladly expend my fortune if I could be relieved of the visions that possess my nocturnal mind, but the great diagnosticians of America and the foremost psychiatrists of Europe have alike labored in vain.

As I sit here now, writing these last words, a calm and a despair burden me, though my head seems clear as seldom before, despite the horror, the loathing, the terror, the revulsion, and the fear that combined in the first, and I believe final, profound shock which annihilated only a few minutes ago, and in full daylight, what hopes I had of fulfilling my life. The dreadful thing is at my elbow while I write; and when I have written, I shall destroy.

Let me go back for many years. I have been, I repeat, subject since early childhood to hideous dreams. Disembodied heads that rolled after me; cities of colossal and alien statuary; fire that burned and beasts that leaped; falls downward from titanic precipices; falls skyward up from pits of ancient evil; the old ones, waiting and waiting; flights through eternal blackness from nothing or something I only sensed; the grind of infernal torture machines against my flesh; monsters all of flowers and animals, fish and birds and stones, wood and metal and gas united incredibly; the pale avengers; descent into necrophilic regions; the leering of a bodiless eye in the midst of vast and forlorn plains; a corpse that rose and turned upon me the visage of a friend, with tentacles and ribbons of tattered black flesh writhing outward as though blown by gusts of wind; the little ones who pattered toward me with strange supplications; sunlight upon an oak-covered hill, sunlight whose malignance, nameless color, pulse, and odor instilled in me

the unreasoning hate that is allied with madness; orchids lifting blooms like children's faces, and sipping blood; the dead ones who came, and came again; that awful moment when I drowned, and a fat thing swam out of the sea-depths to nibble; mewing blades of grass which purred avidly as my feet trod upon them; these and countless other such nightmares, inflicted through slumber as far back as I can remember, bred in me a deep and rooted aversion to sleep. Yet sleep I must, like all mortal men. And what shall I say of those darker dreams, those fantasmal processions that did not and do not correspond with any knowledge I possess? What of the city beneath the sea, all of vermilion marble and corroded bronze, in whose queerly curved geometry rest the glowing configurations of things that earth never bore? What of the whisperer in darkness, and the call of Cthulhu? I saw the seven deaths of Commoriom, and the twenty-three sleepers where Hali raises its black spires in Carcosa. Who else has witnessed the dead titans waken, or the color out of space, or the ichor of stone gods?

These, these tormented me and wakened me to fever and to sweat in the hours past midnight, and the silence before the gray of dawn. But they were small things, old dreams, compared with those of late.

I CAN not now narrate the events leading up to my acquaintance with Miriam, nor the brief but boundless love that we enjoyed, the eternal marriage we planned, and her tragic death when the airplane in which she was nearing the city from a visit to her parents fell upon the eve of our wedding. Perhaps the shock of that waking nightmare completed the slow devastation to which sleeping nightmares had almost brought my mind. I am not the one to say. Miriam was dead, all her strange beauty, the gray of her eyes, the gray and subdued mood of her personality, the pallor of her cheeks, the haunted and roving spirit prisoned within her, gone. I thought of her as the lady in gray, as she lay in her bier, like a woman from Poe, or an eery creature out of *The Turn of the Screw*. So lovely, so unreal, so alien, and yet so eerily sweet. Dead, and not for me. Even the day was gray, that wild, autumnal afternoon, and the leaves that the wind blew rustled with a dry, sad sound, until the rain began falling later, and the world turned to a duller gray where the noise of slashing drops rivalled the sodden howl of gusts, and I was alone with my loneliness.

In the sanctuary of my chamber that night, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed that Miriam came to me, and took my hand, and led me forth. Now we came to a great and slimy sea, whose frightful color appalled me more than its stench. The blackness of the sea, its viscidity, and the universal atmosphere of decay, made me sick before ever she led me into it, so that the touch of that fluid brought a double horror. Far out in the sea, as I struggled with choking lungs, the lady in gray, who floated luminous above its surface, turned without reason or warning, and guided me back.

I could not account, in the morning, for the awful stuff that coated me, or the mephitic smell in my chamber. Only after arduous labors was I able to remove it from my person, and I was compelled to burn every article that the slimy, sticky, nauseating stuff had stained.

That night, I dreamed merely of skies of flame, and lands whose sinister red masses of rock soared from sere valleys where nothing lived and no plant flourished toward a cyclopean metropolis suspended in the heavens; and thus, for

many nights, my old dreams recurred, until there came a time when I visioned again the lady in gray; and in my sleep, she took me by the hand, and raised me from my bed. We walked across plains of dusty gray, and she led me to a pillar. Now there dwelt in this pillar a great white worm, yet not a worm; a fat thing, like a slug, all gray, and with the face, if I may call the hideous thing such, of a rational creature; a horned visage whose red, white and gray pulp sickened me; but Miriam commanded, and I obeyed. I strode to the pillar, and lo, it fell apart. Out of those shards rose the loathly worm, and I gathered it in my arms. It curled. Then my lady in gray led me across that tremendous and desolate plain to my chamber, where she left me, committing to my care the dweller of the pillar. Over me she bent, and the gray thing kissed the gray woman with its beaked mouth; and then she leaned above me and caressed my lips, and she drifted upon her way, like a fog, soundless, and without visible steps.

I WAS frightened in the morning when I discovered that huge and horrible slug beside me. As I remember, I leaped from bed and with the tongs for my fireplace I beat and crushed it to a froth. Then I wrapped the pulp in the stained sheets, and burned it in the furnace. Then I bathed. Then I found the gray dust on my shoes, as I was dressing, and fear came to me anew.

There is, indeed, in Afterglow Cemetery, where they had buried Miriam, a kind of ashy soil; and though the grass grows green, and tall grow the wild flowers, they have never conquered the soil; so that in spring the gray shows through, and in autumn the dust lies lightly upon dead leaf and dying blade.

But I would not go there to find my tracks; for if I found my prints, I would have the horror of somnambulism added to my delirium; and if I did not find my footsteps, I would have a more poignant fear. *Where had I been? Whence came the gigantic worm?*

Thereafter, for many nights, so many nights that the loss of Miriam became a dull ache partly obliterated in time and memory, I dreamed the old dreams, of falling and fleeing and cities beneath the sea; of torture, of unknown beasts, and of unsocketed eyes.

Then the lady in gray came again one night in early winter, when I was beginning to forget, as much as I could. That night was yesternight. All the day, the snow had been falling, and the northwest wind, with a prolonged wail, had driven it onward, and whipped it into drifts, while the branches of naked trees ground and soughed mournfully together, so that, as the bleakness of evening drew near, I became a prey to melancholy, and depressed by thoughts of Miriam, who was dead. The frozen scream of the wind shrilled higher, and to that far-away cry I fell asleep. And when I slept, she came to me, to lead me forth.

Through the desolate plains she led me, and into the shadows of a forest, whither we penetrated deeper and deeper with the boles of tremendous trees rising ever taller around us; and thus we reached the cavern that she entered; and I followed after, striving to approach her, yet unable to close by one inch the distance between us. Now a strange thing happened, for the cavern swept sharply downward, until it became vertical, plunging toward the bowels of earth; and now a stranger thing happened, for we sank, as though falling gently, and yet we must make an effort, as though we were walking normally, but the horizontal had become the vertical. And slow-

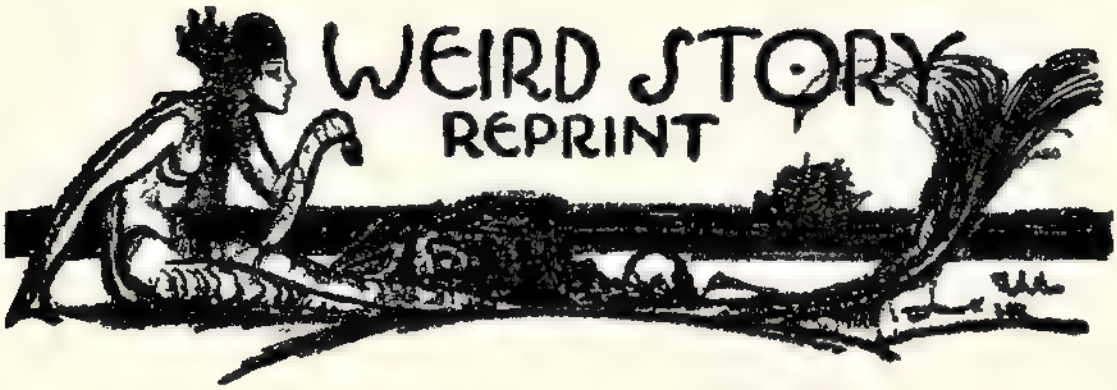
ly I drew closer at last to Miriam, until after age-long falling, we came to rest far, far, incredibly far beneath the surface of earth. And now I found us in the midst of a vault whose ceiling swept onward in arches of ever vaster scope and huger curves, while the walls receded like the naves of a cosmic and buried cathedral; and so I followed her down the aisle of that spacious edifice; and ghostly tapers, rising like giant torches beside our way, cast, in the little damp gusts of wind which fretfully stirred them, grotesque and wavering shadows upon the floor; and the gray robes of Miriam, the gray death-garments, fluttered behind her, streaming almost to my face as the distance between us lessened. Thus we came to the blackwood door, which swung wide and silent upon its great hinges as we approached; and the lady in gray drifted within, and I followed. Now I found myself within a crypt, whose three red tapers, guttering to their end, cast a somber and sinister glow; one at her head, and one at her feet, and one dripping scarlet drops upon her breast. For there lay Miriam, my lady in gray, in repose upon everlasting marble. At her head, a bowl of the slime of the black sea; at her feet, the white worm resurrected; and in her hands, folded across her breast, one the taper, and one a gardenia, whose fragrance, spicy and virginal, overpowered the odor of the chamber of death.

Now in my dream, with the queer logic of dreams, I thought this natural and had no fear; so I went to my lady in gray, and lo, at my coming, the bowl spilled over, but I brushed it aside, and the great worm rose, but I trampled it under, while the candles guttered out, and the gardenia glowed weirdly phosphorescent. By that luminescence, faint as it was, I saw that Miriam stirred, and a sigh passed across her, and I lifted her in my arms. Now the gardenia palely lighted my way, and through the rustling darkness I carried her, and the gray of her robes swept downward and around my ankles as I walked; until I came to the gusty corridor, and the tapers that flared, and the stately march of arches in cathedralesque tiers. So, with the curious illogic of dreams, the vertical corridor disappeared, and I walked onward through the vast chamber, until I emerged upon the plain. The gray dust rose, but the gray robes of Miriam fell about me, and the dust passed away. The heavens were empty of stars. In blackness I walked, save for the single flower whose scent sweetened the air, and whose glow lighted a path. Thus I clung to Miriam, and carried my lady in gray to my chamber.

Only a little ago, I wakened from my dream.

I stared and stared for all eternity, with cycles of oppressive and wildly swirling circles of frozen blackness alternating with red holocausts of flame to shatter the tranquillity of my mind, and for ever. Not again for me the ways of man, or the mortal habitations of earth, or the transitory and ephemeral uncertainties of life. I have written, and now I shall die, of my own hand, and by my own choice.

For, when I wakened, I wakened to see the lady in gray seated beside my bed. In her face were the rotting vestiges of the grave, and her robes hung tattered and moldy; but these three things corrupted me from being: the fresh gardenia in her hands, her finger-nails, long and yellow, as only the finger-nails of those dead and buried six months or more have ever grown; *and the dreadful way in which her hands were twirling the flower, while her black, liquescent eyes centered upon me!*



The Secret of the Growing Gold

By BRAM STOKER

WHEN Margaret Delandre went to live at Brent's Rock the whole neighborhood awoke to the pleasure of an entirely new scandal. Scandals in connection with either the Delandre family or the Brents of Brent's Rock were not few; and if the secret history of the county had been written in full, both names would have been found well represented. It is true that the status of each was so different that they might have belonged to different continents—or to different worlds for the matter of that—for hitherto their orbits had never crossed. The Brents were accorded by the whole section of the country an unique social dominance, and had ever held themselves as high above the yeoman class to which Margaret Delandre belonged, as a blue-blooded Spanish hidalgo out-tops his peasant tenantry.

The Delandres had an ancient record and were proud of it in their way as the Brents were of theirs. But the family had never risen above yeomanry; and although they had been once well-to-do in the good old times of foreign wars and protection, their fortunes had withered under the scorching of the free trade sun and the "piping times of peace." They had, as the elder members used to assert, "stuck to the land," with the result that they had taken root in it, body and soul. In fact, they, having chosen the life of vegetables, had flourished as vegetation does—blossomed and thrived in the good season and suffered in the bad. Their holding, Dander's Croft, seemed to have been worked out, and to be typical of the family which had inhabited it. The latter had declined generation after generation, sending out now and again some abortive shoot of unsatisfied energy in the shape of a soldier or sailor, who had worked his way to the minor grades of the services and had there stopped, cut short either from unheeding gallantry in action or from that destroying cause to men without breeding or youthful care—the recognition of a position above them

which they feel unfitted to fill. So, little by little, the family dropped lower and lower, the men brooding and dissatisfied, and drinking themselves into the grave, the women drudging at home, or marrying beneath them—or worse. In process of time all disappeared, leaving only two in the croft, Wykham Delandre and his sister Margaret. The man and woman seemed to have inherited in masculine and feminine form respectively the evil tendency of their race, sharing in common the principles, though manifesting them in different ways, of sullen passion, voluptuousness and recklessness.

The history of the Brents had been something similar, but showing the causes of decadence in their aristocratic and not their plebeian forms. They, too, had sent their shoots to the wars; but their positions had been different, and they had often attained honor—for without flaw they were gallant, and brave deeds were done by them before the selfish dissipation which marked them had sapped their vigor.

The present head of the family—if family it could now be called when but one remained of the direct line—was Geoffrey Brent. He was a type of a worn-out race, manifesting in some ways its most brilliant qualities, and in others its utter degradation. He was certainly handsome, with that dark, aquiline, commanding beauty which women so generally recognize as dominant. With men he was distant and cold; but such a bearing never deters womankind. The inscrutable laws of sex have so arranged that even a timid woman is not afraid of a fierce and haughty man. And so it was that there was hardly a woman of any kind or degree, who lived within view of Brent's Rock, who did not cherish some form of secret admiration for the handsome wastrel.

So long as Geoffrey Brent confined his dissipations to London and Paris and Vienna—anywhere out of sight and sound of his home—opinion was silent. It is easy to listen to far-off echoes unmoved, and we can treat them with disbelief, or scorn, or disdain, or whatever attitude of coldness may suit our purpose. But when the scandal came close home it was another matter; and the feeling of independence and integrity which is in people of every community asserted itself and demanded that condemnation should be expressed. Still there was a certain reticence in all, and no more notice was taken of the existing facts than was absolutely necessary. Margaret Delandre bore herself so fearlessly and so openly, she accepted her position as the justified companion of Geoffrey Brent so naturally, that people came to believe she was secretly married to him, and therefore thought it wiser to hold their tongues lest time should justify her and also make her an active enemy.

THE one person who, by his interference, could have settled all doubts was debarred by circumstances from interfering in the matter. Wykham Delandre had quarrelled with his sister—or perhaps it was that she had quarrelled with him—and they were on terms not merely of armed neutrality but of bitter hatred. The quarrel had been antecedent to Margaret going to Brent's Rock. She and Wykham had almost come to blows. There had certainly been threats on one side and on the other; and in the end Wykham, overcome with passion, had ordered his sister to leave his house. She had risen straightway, and, without waiting to pack up even her own personal belongings, had walked out of the house. On the threshold she had paused for a moment to hurl a bitter threat at Wykham that

he would rue in shame and despair to the last hour of his life his act of that day.

Some weeks had since passed; and it was understood in the neighborhood that Margaret had gone to London, when she suddenly appeared driving out with Geoffrey Brent, and the entire neighborhood knew before nightfall that she had taken up her abode at the Rock. It was no subject of surprize that Brent had come back unexpectedly, for such was his usual custom. Even his own servants never knew when to expect him, for there was a private door, of which he alone had the key, by which he sometimes entered without any one in the house being aware of his coming. This was his usual method of appearing after a long absence.

Wykham Delandre was furious at the news. He vowed vengeance — and to keep his mind level with his passion drank deeper than ever. He tried several times to see his sister, but she contemptuously refused to meet him. He tried to have an interview with Brent and was refused by him also. Then he tried to stop him in the road, but without avail, for Geoffrey was not a man to be stopped against his will. Several actual encounters took place between the two men, and many more were threatened and avoided. At last Wykham Delandre settled down to a morose, vengeful acceptance of the situation.

Neither Margaret nor Geoffrey was of a pacific temperament, and it was not long before there began to be quarrels between them. One thing would lead to another, and wine flowed freely at Brent's Rock. Now and again the quarrels would assume a bitter aspect, and threats would be exchanged in uncompromising language that fairly awed the listening servants. But such quarrels generally ended where domestic altercations do, in reconciliation, and in a mutual respect for the fighting qualities proportionate to their manifestation. Geoffrey and Margaret made occasional absences from Brent's Rock, and on each of these occasions Wykham Delandre also absented himself; but as he generally heard of the absence too late to be of any service, he returned home each time in a bitter and discontented frame of mind.

At last there came a time when the absence from Brent's Rock became longer than before. Only a few days earlier there had been a quarrel, exceeding in bitterness anything which had gone before; but this, too, had been made up, and a trip on the Continent had been mentioned before the servants. After a few days Wykham Delandre also went away, and it was some weeks before he returned. It was noticed that he was full of some new importance — satisfaction, exaltation — they hardly knew how to call it. He went straightway to Brent's Rock, and demanded to see Geoffrey Brent, and on being told that he had not yet returned, said, with a grim decision which the servants noted:

"I shall come again. My news is solid —it can wait!" and turned away.

Week after week went by, and month after month; and then there came a rumor, certified later on, that an accident had occurred in the Zermatt valley. While crossing a dangerous pass, the carriage containing an English lady and the driver had fallen over a precipice, the gentleman of the party, Mr. Geoffrey Brent, having been fortunately saved as he had been walking up the hill to ease the horses. He gave information, and search was made. The broken rail, the excoriated roadway, the marks where the horses had struggled on the decline before finally pitching over into the torrent —all told the sad tale. It was a wet season, and there had been much snow

in the winter, so that the river was swollen beyond its usual volume, and the eddies of the stream were packed with ice. All search was made, and finally the wreck of the carriage and the body of one horse were found in an eddy of the river. Later on the body of the driver was found on the sandy, torrent-swept waste near Täsch; but the body of the lady, like that of the other horse, had quite disappeared, and was—what was left of it by that time—whirling amongst the eddies of the Rhone on its way down to the Lake of Geneva.

Wykham Delandre made all the inquiries possible, but could not find any trace of the missing woman. He found, however, in the books of the various hotels the name of "Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Brent." And he had a stone erected at Zermatt to his sister's memory, under her married name, and a tablet put up in the church at Bretten, the parish in which both Brent's Rock and Dander's Croft were situated.

There was a lapse of nearly a year, after the excitement of the matter had worn away, and the whole neighborhood had gone on its accustomed way. Brent was still absent, and Delandre more drunken, more morose, and more revengeful than before.

Then there was a new excitement. Brent's Rock was being made ready for a new mistress. It was officially announced by Geoffrey himself in a letter to the vicar, that he had been married some months before to an Italian lady, and that they were then on their way home. Then a small army of workmen invaded the house; and hammer and plane sounded, and a general air of size and paint pervaded the atmosphere. One wing of the old house, the south, was entirely re-done; and then the great body of the workmen departed, leaving only materials for the doing of the old hall when Geoffrey Brent should have returned, for he had directed that the decoration was only to be done under his own eyes. He had brought with him accurate drawings of a hall in the house of his bride's father, for he wished to reproduce for her the place to which she had been accustomed. As the molding had all to re-done, some scaffolding poles and boards were brought in and laid on one side of the great hall, and also a great wooden tank or box for mixing the lime, which was laid in bags beside it.

When the new mistress of Brent's Rock arrived, the bells of the church rang out, and there was a general jubilation. She was a beautiful creature, full of the poetry and fire and passion of the South; and the few English words which she had learned were spoken in such a sweet and pretty broken way that she won the hearts of the people almost as much by the music of her voice as by the melting beauty of her dark eyes.

Geoffrey Brent seemed more happy than he had ever before appeared; but there was a dark, anxious look on his face that was new to those who knew him of old, and he started at times as though at some noise that was unheard by others.

And so months passed and the whisper grew that at last Brent's Rock was to have an heir. Geoffrey was very tender to his wife, and the new bond between them seemed to soften him. He took more interest in his tenants and their needs than he had ever done; and works of charity on his part as well as on his sweet young wife's were not lacking. He seemed to have set all his hopes on the child that was coming, and as he looked deeper into the future the dark shadow that had come over his face died gradually away.

All the time Wykham Delandre nursed his revenge. Deep in his heart had grown up a purpose of vengeance which only waited an opportunity to crystallize and take a definite shape. His vague idea was somehow centered in the wife of Brent, for he knew that he could strike him best through those he loved, and the coming time seemed to hold in its womb the opportunity for which he longed. One night he sat alone in the living-room of his house. It had once been a handsome room in its way, but time and neglect had done their work and it was now little better than a ruin, without dignity or picturesqueness of any kind. He had been drinking heavily for some time and was more than half stupefied. He thought he heard a noise as of some one at the door and looked up. Then he called half savagely to come in; but there was no response. With a muttered blasphemy he renewed his potations.

Presently he forgot all around him, sank into a daze, but suddenly awoke to see standing before him some one or something like a battered, ghostly edition of his sister. For a few moments there came upon him a sort of fear. The woman before him, with distorted features and burning eyes, seemed hardly human, and the only thing that seemed a reality of his sister, as she had been, was her wealth of golden hair, and this was now streaked with gray. She eyed her brother with a long, cold stare; and he, too, as he looked and began to realize the actuality of her presence, found the hatred of her which he had had, once again surging up in his heart. All the brooding passion of the past year seemed to find a voice at once as he asked her:

"Why are you here? You're dead and buried."

"I am here, Wykham Delandre, for no love of you, but because I hate another even more than I do you!" A great passion blazed in her eyes.

"Him?" he asked, in so fierce a whisper that even the woman was for an instant startled till she regained her calm.

"Yes, him!" she answered. "But make no mistake, my revenge is my own; and I merely use you to help me to it."

Wykham asked suddenly:

"Did he marry you?"

The woman's distorted face broadened out in a ghastly attempt at a smile. It was a hideous mockery, for the broken features and seamed scars took strange shapes and strange colors, and queer lines of white showed out as the straining muscles pressed on the old cicatrices.

"So you would like to know! It would please your pride to feel that your sister was truly married! Well, you shall not know. That was my revenge on you, and I do not mean to change it by a hair's breadth. I have come here tonight simply to let you know that I am alive, so that if any violence be done me where I am going there may be a witness."

"Where are you going?" demanded her brother.

"That is my affair! and I have not the least intention of letting you know!"

Wykham stood up, but the drink was on him and he reeled and fell. As he lay on the floor he announced his intention of following his sister; and with an outburst of splenetic humor told her that he would follow her through the darkness by the light of her hair, and of her beauty. At this she turned on him, and said that there were others beside him that would rue her hair and her beauty too. "As he will," she hissed; "for the hair remains though the beauty be gone. When he withdrew the linchpin and sent

(Please turn to page 779)

THE EYRIE

THE October WEIRD TALES seems to have been unusually well received by you, the readers, to judge by your letters. But you are of two minds as to whether we should always cover up the bodies of the beauteous women on our covers. The following letter from A. B. Leonard, of Portsmouth, Ohio, takes a stand in favor of unclad beauty on the covers:

"I would like to say a few words to some of the readers who object to the pictures which have appeared on WT the last few issues," writes Mr. Leonard. "Now this letter is not a polemic, nor do I write in any spirit of malice, but with all the sympathy and understanding possible for those who object to the depicting of the naked female body on the cover. Now, Mr. Dilbeck, I looked back to the June and July issues which you mentioned in your letter to the Eyrie; so I shall ask you to get your June, July, August and September copies. You will notice that in each case the picture illustrates a scene from the main story. If you will turn to these stories you will find that all of the scenes that are pictured on the cover are unusually dramatic, the very kind that an artist would naturally wish to depict. In these scenes the women are described as naked—not nude, not undraped, but as naked. Is that such an ugly word? At least it is an honest word. Now take your September copy, for it has every element in it that has been used in argument in WT by the pros and cons on the question of pictures. On the cover are two women, one naked, the other partly clothed. If you will look at this picture in an unbiased manner you will agree that the brunette is more provocative than is the blond. The reason is that the brunette half conceals, half reveals, so that your imagination is fired; whereas the blond is merely naked and that is all. Now read the story: it is exciting, highly exciting; yet it is not a sex story. The difference between these pictures and those on so-called sexy magazines is that whereas these pictures illustrate a situation met with in the story, the pictures on other magazines are merely provocative with no bearing on any story, or even the general policy of the magazine itself. Well, this is all, and in closing I wish to send my compliments to the artist who drew the picture on page 701 of the June installment of *Golden Blood*."

Writes Margaret Sylvester, of Denver, in a letter to the Eyrie: "Please, please dispose of the unclad ladies on your covers for good. They cheapen and degrade your otherwise splendid magazine. From the August issue—my first but by no means my last—I began to watch the stands for your magazine. So far, my favorite stories are *The Vampire Airplane*, *Malay Horror*, and *The Seed from the Sepulcher*. The latter just about congealed my blood, and *Malay Horror* made me look sideways at

the window several times before going to bed. But, I ask you, must Robert E. Howard go Tarzanish on us? He is beginning to sound like Edgar Rice Burroughs with all these Conan stories. For anyone who can write as well as Mr. Howard, it is best to stick to an individual theme."

Louis C. Smith, of Oakland, California, writes to the Eyrie: "Here's to a better and bigger WEIRD TALES—which it will be if you get more tales by Clark Ashton Smith, Edmond Hamilton and Francis Flagg (who wrote one of the strangest tales I ever read—*The Picture*). I would like to see them in every issue."

"The story I liked best in the October issue," writes William Nelson, of Delavan, Wisconsin, "is *The Plutonian Terror,* by Jack Williamson. I liked this story immensely, partly because of the arrangement of the events, and mostly because I have dreamed, and silly as it may seem, longed to be the last person on earth with one or two companions, boys. Altogether it is a splendid story."

Duane W. Rimel, of Asotin, Washington, writes to the Eyrie: "As a rule I do not like interplanetary stories very well, but *The Plutonian Terror* by Jack Williamson is a refreshing exception. It has everything that makes a narrative gripping. *The Festival* by H. P. Lovecraft is a masterpiece in weird settings. The excerpts from the *Necronomicon* made it doubly impressive. Third place, I believe, goes to *The Mansion of Unholy Magic* by Seabury Quinn. I am saving *The Vampire Master* till I get it all."

Writes Harold F. Keating, of Quincy, Massachusetts: "My dictionary defines the word 'weird' as supernatural and uncanny. I fail to see where these words apply to rotten corpses, slimy putrescence, or gushing entrails. A story can be weird without being disgusting. In the old days, the stories in your magazine dealt more with transmigration of souls, reincarnation, robots, brain transplanting, man-eating plants, voodoo, witchcraft, retribution, etc. Decay is just a process of nature, and there is nothing uncanny or supernatural about it, whether it be a corpse or a rotten tomato; but when you have two souls or spirits trying to gain control of a body, then it enters the sphere of the supernatural. It was stories of this type that built up WEIRD TALES. Please keep them weird. As to the form and general appearance of WEIRD TALES, it has certainly improved a thousand per cent over the old days; the illustrations, likewise, except for the pictures of naked women on the cover. No one can say there is anything supernatural or uncanny about a naked woman."

"I have just finished my 81st issue of WEIRD TALES," writes Lionel Dilbeck, of Wichita, Kansas. "I was certainly surprized to see my five favorite authors in the same issue; viz., Long, Lovecraft, Smith, Quinn and Howard. I have two other favorites: Dyalhis and A. Merritt, but apparently they don't write for you any more." [We are reprinting A. Merritt's remarkable story, *The Woman of the Wood,* in next month's issue. A striking new story by Mr. Dyalhis, *The Sapphire Goddess,* will appear in our February number.—THE EDITORS.]

Frederick John Walsen, of Denver, writes to the Eyrie: "Allow me to express my delight with the superfine October issue of the incomparable WEIRD TALES. It was beyond reproach in any way whatsoever. *The Mansion of Unholy Magic,* by Seabury Quinn, took first place for its excellent action and sheer beauty of words. Mr. Quinn's tales are always to be admired; he is one of your very best authors. *The Pool*

of the Black One, by Robert E. Howard, claims second place for its wonderful descriptive qualities and fine narrative. The stories of Mr. Howard are always masterpieces."

Jack Williamson writes from his home in New Mexico: "If I may be pardoned for presuming to comment before I have read all of it, *The Vampire Master* is deftly done, its treatment of the vampire material unusual, showing the operation of a mind more strongly logical than is usual in writers of the supernatural. The cover is a masterpiece—and incidentally, I think, much better in accord with the spirit of the magazine than some of the previous covers by M. Brundage, though they all have been remarkable. It is unfortunate that some readers should be offended by the beauty of the human body. . . . I was rather surprized at the brickbat aimed by Miss Sylvia Bennett at Howard's *Black Colossus,* which struck me as a splendid thing, darkly vivid, with a living primitive power."

"I have read your magazine for almost seven years," writes Anders Stortroen, of Appleton, Wisconsin, "and have had no serious fault to find with *any* stories. How about another illustration in each story?"

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes to the Eyrie: "Too much praise can not be given the stories in the October number of WEIRD TALES. It is easily the most superb collection of stories in one issue, in many months. Jack Williamson leads off with his unusual novelette, *The Plutonian Terror.* It is different from anything he has yet written—the eery beginning of finding the earth depopulated—the trip to Pluto and the encounter with the Brain—the surprize ending. The tale easily deserves first place. I am disappointed in that you did not give it a cover illustration. Seabury Quinn has surpassed all previous de Grandin stories with *The Mansion of Unholy Magic.* For third place I select *The Pool of the Black One.* The creepy weird adventure tales by Robert E. Howard never grow tiresome. The stort stories are the weirdest you have printed in a long time. If every issue of WEIRD TALES could have such a fine collection, you would never need to fear a competitor."

Writes I. D. Arden, of Detroit: "It has always been my silent desire that some day WEIRD TALES would have a little department wherein the authors could be discussed intimately. The readers of WEIRD TALES *must* be interested in the authors who write the nifty stories that appear therein. Quinn, Lovecraft, Howard, Smith, and the host of others, all seem like old friends to me; that's why I'd like to know something about them. A page each month would not be too much, but please do not use any Eyrie space, as this interesting little department is much too short now. I would suggest that you also have their photograph or sketch."

Writes Blanche W. Schoonmaker, of Philadelphia: "Ever since your magazine has been on the market I have found it an avenue of escape from the regular affairs of daily life. You have published a remarkably high percentage of good yarns. It is fine to be able to find something which differs from the usual run of magazine tales. But why don't you bring out Lovecraft's stuff in book form? My husband and I would like to add such a volume to our quite extensive library of 'creepy' fiction. It seems to me that Lovecraft has the same faculty that Arthur Machen has—that of suggesting unspeakable horrors without actually telling too much—which is the best basis on which to build the 'creeps'. When one becomes too explicit, the effect is

lost." [We hope to have an important announcement to make soon about Lovecraft's stories.—THE EDITORS.]

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Robert E. Howard's fantastic story, *The Pool of the Black One*, took first place in your favor among the stories in the October issue, as shown by your votes and letters.

Weird Tales Welcomes a New Author

DEAR EDITOR: Well, I see that the interplanetary fight has spread from WT to the MAGIC CARPET. Now in the past I have always been against the interplanetary bunch, but I have changed my mind: they are right and I am wrong; so to make amends I have decided to write an interplanetary story and have it published in the Aerie. It is yours for the asking.

Now let's see, the first thing that I must do is select a title that sounds very scientific and interplanetary, so how about "Chasing Around Chologogue, or A Brave Boy's Fight for Fortune"? Here goes. Typesetter, grab a stickful of exclamation points!

"QUICK!" cried Xaxax, "seven more ooks and we shall be in the galaxy of Chologogue!" I looked at the ookmeter on my wrist and sure enough only seven ooks remained until our space-ship would fall into the gravitation-pull of great Chologogue, the central sun about which the four outlaw planets, Gahook, Gedunk, Heynonny-nonny and Hotcha-cha, the last especially, were revolving!

We entered the forbidden territory and swung once around great Chologogue! This took us 20,000 light years, but what are a few thousand light years more or less!

"Quick!" cried Xaxax, "here come some space-ships from Gahook! It is manned by Gahookians! They have death-ray guns!"

I looked at the Gahookians, and sure enough they were all heavily armed with death-ray guns! They crowded forward on their space-ship eager to board our ship and grapple hand to hand! The Gahookians were of a greenish red color with bulging foreheads and globular bodies! Each had three eyes, red, white, and blue! Two arms hung on one side and three were on the other! They were octapodal, having four legs at the bottom of their bodies, one leg under their three arms and two legs under their two arms! One leg grew out of the top of their heads (this was to stand on when the other seven legs got tired!)!

I turned my disintegrating ray on them and soon disintegrated them together with the planet, Gahook! Then we were off to Gedunk!

"Quick!" cried Xaxax, "here come some space-ships from Gedunk! It is manned by Gedunkians! They have death-ray guns!"

I looked at the Gedunkians, and sure enough they were all heavily armed with death-ray guns! They crowded forward on their space-ship, eager to board our ship and grapple hand to hand! The Gedunkians were striped with red and black, and had three eyes, red, yellow, and green (for stop, caution and go!)! Their bodies were partly protoplasmic, partly gaseous, and partly of some metal with which I was unfamiliar! They had no feet but made their way about by rolling up in a ball and rolling wherever they wished to go!

(Please turn to page 778)

Coming Next Month

"YOU mean that I am to allow myself to be sent as a life prisoner to Rose Crater?"

"Precisely!"

I rose from the chair and took my hat in my hand. But the man took me by the shoulder.

"Don't go," he urged. "I am in earnest."

"So am I," I replied, rather angrily. "You must think that just because I am a college professor and out of work I am nothing but a fool! If you want to know about Rose Crater, why not ask the Government? I understand that it is a penitentiary for Federal prisoners convicted under the Interstate Criminal Act. Suppose you did want to make a private investigation? Why not hire a detective agency to do your work for you? Certainly not a college professor who is more interested in ants than in criminals and in butterflies than prisons. And to go there as a criminal! As a murderer! I may be poor, but I still have my good name."

The man took me by both shoulders and jammed me into an overstuffed armchair. I was surprized to see the tremendous strength he had.

"You have to listen to me, Professor. I am supposed to be a gangster; in fact, I am supposed to be their leader, their brains in America. Guess I have some intelligence to be a free man today. If power or wealth or brute force could have been employed so that I could find out what I want to about Rose Crater, I should have enough of all three. But it takes more than that. Someone has to go in there and come out, and so far the road to that prison is a one-way road. The prisoners go in, *but they never come out. Not even after they die.* I am looking for a man brave enough to go in, intelligent enough to find out what is going on in there and clever enough to escape." . . .

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By DALE CLARK

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January WEIRD TALES Out January 1

(Continued from page 776)

I turned my disintegrating ray on them and soon disintegrated them together with the planet, Gedunk! Then we were off to Hotchacha!

"Quick!" cried Xaxax, "here come some space-ships from Hotchacha! It is manned by Hotchachagoans! They have death-ray guns!"

I looked at the Hotchachagoans, and sure enough they were all heavily armed with death-ray guns! They crowded forward on their space-ship, eager to board our ship and grapple hand to hand! The Hotchachagoans were an insect race, being composed of mantis head, spider eyes, cockroach legs, locust wings, and continually shouted "Katy did!"

I turned my disintegrating ray on them and soon disintegrated them together with the planet, Hotchacha! Then we were off to Heynonny-nonny!

"Quick!" cried Xaxax, "here come some space-ships from Heynonny-nonny!"

I looked and didn't see anything!

"I see nothing!" I cried!

"That's right!" cried Xaxax, "They are nothing-people!"

I knew that my disintegrating ray was useless on the Heynonny-nonnians for you can't disintegrate nothing! So I rushed back into our space-ship and picked up an old cigar box that I kept old screws, nails, odd pieces of wire, and other odds and ends in and soon constructed an *integrating ray!*

I turned the integrating ray on them and soon integrated them together with the planet, Heynonny-nonny!

Then taking a whirl about great Chologogue, Xaxax and I returned to our home studio!

[*Finis!*]

I HAVE five exclamation points left over, so I will use them here! KEEP *WEIRD TALES* WEIRD! ! ! !

Yours truly,
ALONZO LEONARD.

My favorite stories in the December WEIRD TALES are:

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The Secret of the Growing Gold

(Continued from page 772)

us over the precipice into the torrent, he had little thought of my beauty. Perhaps his beauty would be scarred like mine were he whirled, as I was, among the rocks of the Visp, and frozen on the ice pack in the drift of the river. But let him beware! His time is coming!" and with a fierce gesture she flung open the door and passed out into the night.

LATER on that night, Mrs. Brent, who was but half asleep, became suddenly awake and spoke to her husband:

"Geoffrey, was not that the click of a lock somewhere below our window?"

But Geoffrey—though she thought that he, too, had started at the noise—seemed sound asleep, and breathed heavily. Again Mrs. Brent dozed; but this time awoke to the fact that her husband had arisen and was partly dressed. He was deadly pale, and when the light of the lamp which he had in his hand fell on his face, she was frightened at the look in his eyes.

"What is it, Geoffrey? What dost thou?" she asked.

"Hush! little one," he answered, in a strange, hoarse voice. "Go to sleep. I am restless, and wish to finish some work I left undone."

"Bring it here, my husband," she said; "I am lonely and I fear when thou art away."

For reply he merely kissed her and went out, closing the door behind him. She lay awake for awhile, and then nature asserted itself, and she slept.

Suddenly she started broad awake with the memory in her ears of a smothered cry from somewhere not far off. She jumped up and ran to the door and lis-

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tened, but there was no sound. She grew alarmed for her husband, and called out: "Geoffrey! Geoffrey!"

After a few moments the door of the great hall opened, and Geoffrey appeared at it, but without his lamp.

"Hush!" he said, in a sort of whisper, and his voice was harsh and stern. "Hush! Get to bed! I am working, and must not be disturbed. Go to sleep, and do not wake the house!"

With a chill in her heart — for the harshness of her husband's voice was new to her—she crept back to bed and lay there trembling, too frightened to cry, and listened to every sound. There was a long pause of silence, and then the sound of some iron implement striking muffled blows! Then there came a clang of a heavy stone falling, followed by a muffled curse. Then a dragging sound, and then more noise of stone on stone. She lay all the while in an agony of fear, and her heart beat dreadfully. She heard a curious sort of scraping sound; and then there was silence.

Presently the door opened gently, and Geoffrey appeared. His wife pretended to be asleep; but through her eyelashes she saw him wash from his hands something white that looked like lime.

In the morning he made no allusion to the previous night, and she was afraid to ask any questions.

FROM that day there seemed some shadow over Geoffrey Brent. He neither ate nor slept as he had been accustomed, and his former habit of turning suddenly as though some one were speaking from behind him revived. The old hall seemed to have some kind of fascination for him. He used to go there many times a day, but grew impatient if any one else, even his wife, entered it. When the builder's foreman came to inquire about continuing his work Geoffrey was out driving; the man went into the hall, and when Geoffrey returned the servant told him of his arrival and where he was. With a frightful oath he pushed the servant aside and hurried up to the old hall. The workman met him almost at the door; and as Geoffrey burst into the room he ran against him. The man apologized:

"Beg pardon, sir, but I was just going out to make some inquiries. I directed twelve sacks of lime to be sent here, but I see there are only ten."

"Damn the ten sacks and the twelve too!" was the ungracious and incomprehensible rejoinder.

The workman looked surprized, and tried to turn the conversation.

"I see, sir, there is a little matter which our people must have done; but the governor will of course see it set right at his own cost."

"What do you mean?"

"That 'ere 'arth-stone, sir: Some idiot must have put a scaffold pole on it and cracked it right down the middle, and it's thick enough you'd think to stand hanything." Geoffrey was silent for quite a minute, and then said in a constrained voice and with much gentler manner:

"Tell your people that I am not going on with the work in the hall at present. I want to leave it as it is for a while longer."

"All right, sir. I'll send up a few of our chaps to take away these poles and lime bags and tidy the place up a bit."

"No! No!" said Geoffrey, "leave them where they are. I shall send and tell you when you are to get on with the work." So the foreman went away, and his comment to his master was:

"I'd send in the bill, sir, for the work already done. 'Pears to me that money's a little shaky in that quarter."

Once or twice Delandre tried to stop Brent on the road, and, at last, finding that he could not attain his object, rode after the carriage, calling out:

"What has become of my sister, your wife?"

Geoffrey lashed his horses into a gallop, and the other, seeing from his white face and from his wife's collapse almost into a faint that his object was attained, rode away with a scowl and a laugh.

That night when Geoffrey went into the hall he passed over to the great fireplace, and all at once started back with a smothered cry. Then with an effort he pulled himself together and went away, returning with a light. He bent down over the broken hearth-stone to see if the moonlight falling through the storied window had in any way deceived him. Then with a groan of anguish he sank to his knees.

There, sure enough, through the crack in the broken stone were protruding a multitude of threads of golden hair just tinged with gray!

He was disturbed by a noise at the door, and looking round, saw his wife standing in the doorway. In the desperation of the moment he took action to prevent discovery, and lighting a match at the lamp, stooped down and burned away the hair that rose through the broken stone. Then rising as nonchalantly as he could, he pretended surprize at seeing his wife beside him.

For the next week he lived in an agony; for, whether by accident or design, he could not find himself alone in the hall for any length of time. At each visit the hair had grown afresh through the crack, and he had to watch it carefully lest his terrible secret should be discovered. He tried to find a receptacle for the body of the murdered woman outside the house, but some one always interrupted

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for October 1, 1933.

State of Illinois } ss.
County of Cook }

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member must be given.)

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5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is._____ (This information is required from daily publications only.)

WM. R. SPRENGER,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1933. RICHARD S. GOULDEN,
[SEAL] Notary Public.

My commission expires May 3, 1934.

him; and once, when he was coming out of the private doorway, he was met by his wife, who began to question him about it, and manifested surprize that she should not have before noticed the key which he now reluctantly showed her. Geoffrey dearly and passionately loved his wife, so that any possibility of her discovering his dread secrets, or even of doubting him, filled him with anguish; and after a couple of days had passed, he could not help coming to the conclusion that, at least, she suspected something.

That very evening she came into the hall after her drive and found him there sitting moodily by the deserted fireplace. She spoke to him directly.

"Geoffrey, I have been spoken to by that fellow Delandre, and he says horrible things. He tells to me that a week ago his sister returned to his house, the wreck and ruin of her former self, with only her golden hair as of old, and announced some fell intention. He asked me where she is—and oh, Geoffrey, she is dead, she is dead! So how can she have returned? Oh! I am in dread, and I know not where to turn!"

For answer, Geoffrey burst into a torrent of blasphemy which made her shudder. He cursed Delandre and his sister and all their kind, and in especial he hurled curse after curse on her golden hair.

"Oh, hush! hush!" she said, and was then silent, for she feared her husband when she saw the evil effect of his humor. Geoffrey in the torrent of his anger stood up and moved away from the hearth; but suddenly stopped as he saw a new look of terror in his wife's eyes. He followed their glance, and then he, too, shuddered —for there on the broken hearth-stone lay a golden streak as the points of the hair rose through the crack.

"Look, look!" she shrieked. "Is it some ghost of the dead! Come away—come away!" and seizing her husband by the wrist with the frenzy of madness, she pulled him from the room.

That night she was in a raging fever. The doctor of the district attended her at once, and special aid was telegraphed for to London. Geoffrey was in despair, and in his anguish at the danger of his young wife almost forgot his own crime and its consequences.

In the evening the doctor had to leave to attend to others; but he left Geoffrey in charge of his wife. His last words were:

"Remember, you must humor her till I come in the morning, or till some other doctor has her case in hand. What you have to dread is another attack of emotion. See that she is kept warm. Nothing more can be done."

Late in the evening, when the rest of the household had retired, Geoffrey's wife got up from her bed and called to her husband.

"Come!" she said. "Come to the old hall! I know where the gold comes from! I want to see it grow!"

Geoffrey would fain have stopped her, but he feared for her life or reason on the one hand, and lest in a paroxysm she should shriek out her terrible suspicion, and seeing that it was useless to try to prevent her, wrapped a warm rug around her and went with her to the old hall. When they entered, she turned and shut the door and locked it.

"We want no strangers amongst us three tonight!" she whispered with a wan smile.

"We three! nay we are but two," said Geoffrey with a shudder; he feared to say more.

"Sit here," said his wife as she put out the light. "Sit here by the hearth and

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watch the gold growing. The silver moonlight is jealous! See, it steals along the floor toward the gold—our gold!"

Geoffrey looked with growing horror, and saw that during the hours that had passed the golden hair had protruded further through the broken hearth-stone. He tried to hide it by placing his feet over the broken place; and his wife, drawing her chair beside him, leant over and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Now do not stir, dear," she said; "let us sit still and watch. We shall find the secret of the growing gold!"

He passed his arm round her and sat silent; and as the moonlight stole along the floor she sank to sleep.

He feared to wake her; and so sat silent and miserable as the hours stole away.

Before his horror-struck eyes the golden hair from the broken stone grew and grew; and as it increased, so his heart got colder and colder, till at last he had not power to stir, and sat with eyes full of terror watching his doom.

IN THE morning when the London doctor came, neither Geoffrey nor his wife could be found. Search was made in all the rooms, but without avail. As a last resource the great door of the old hall was broken open, and those who entered saw a grim and sorry sight.

There by the deserted hearth Geoffrey Brent and his young wife sat cold and white and dead. Her face was peaceful, and her eyes were closed in sleep; but his face was a sight that made all who saw it shudder, for there was on it a look of unutterable horror. The eyes were open and stared glassily at his feet, which were twined with tresses of golden hair, streaked with gray, which came through the broken hearth-stone.

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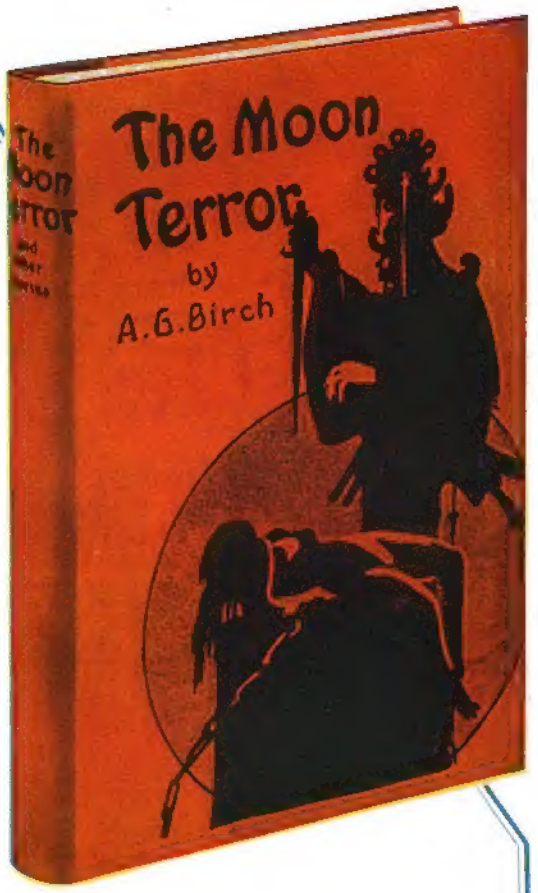

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